

P O R T A L S



*A literary journal by
Purdue University North Central students*



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Portals

A Literary Journal



PURDUE UNIVERSITY
NORTH CENTRAL

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Matthew R. Kominiarek

Foreword

It seems appropriate to introduce a journal filled with both criticism and creative writing with a quotation from a critic and writer from the last century whose centenary death in 2000 is sparking current interest. In “The Critic as Artist,” Oscar Wilde argues that “it is through art, and through art only, that we can realize our perfection; through art, and through art only that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence” (*Collected Works* 851). This apparent contradiction, I think, seems to be the basis of many of the essays, short stories, poetry, and criticism found within these pages. Each one exposes what is meant to be concealed. Loneliness highlights the individual’s need for society; death reveals, always too late, the irreverent son’s love long buried; and mothers still seem to hold that quixotic position in the family: both condemned and valued for knowing too much. These winning selections clearly identify what is both perfect and sordid in our existence.

Each year, as director of the Writing Contest, I must find judges to select, critically and professionally, the winners of the annual contest. This is not an easy job. The judges read each entry carefully and thoughtfully. While some categories have up to 45 submissions, others, less popular, may have dense and lengthy prose requiring the same amount of time and effort to judge. In addition to giving these valiant judges copious amounts of pages to evaluate, I also give them a deadline. And to make matters worse, I recruit and saddle these judges with all this work during the busiest time of the semester. I’m surprised I’m still alive. While I’m still breathing, I want to take this opportunity to thank the following chivalrous judges for volunteering their expertise and time: Professor Lee Block, Dr. Pat Buckler, Professor Marc Kniola, Professor Sharon Starr Koelm, Dr. Jane Rose, Dr. Roger Schlobin, Dr. Tom Young. I also want to thank the student editors who also place posters, judge, and edit the winning entries: Carina Atherton-Lira, Lesa Cotto, Jody Kingery, Kate Barcus Miller, Amber Pursell, Michelle Tomlin, Kym Tracy.

The editors appreciate Chancellor Dale Alsbaugh’s continued financial support. We are also indebted to Darlene Bremer, Jean-Ann Morton of Letters and Languages, Joy Banyas and Karen Prescott of the Publications Office for their equally intrepid work.

Dr. Susan Hillabold

Director of the Writing Contest and Editor of Portals

Contents

FICTION

My Elderly Angel
ROBERT D. COX 3

Different Day, Same Son
ROBERT D. COX 9

Graduation
ARTHUR J. CURRY 16

POETRY AND POETICS

Profit and Loss
MATTHEW R. KOMINIAREK 22

Soulmate
ROBERT D. COX 24

Woman's Rites
LESA M. COTTO 25

My Momma
DORI SCHNICK 26

Thoughts from a Reading
NANCY C. HOWELL 28

PERSONAL ESSAYS

Pain, Hate, and Disrespect
DAVID RILEY 33

My Home
CHRIS MILLER 37

A Family Ritual Worth Repeating
CHRIS WOLFENBARGER 40

The Genes Make You Do It
SALLIE E. JOHNSON 44

Hair
CASSANDRA HINE 46

RESEARCH ESSAYS

Crime and Punishment
ARTHUR J. CURRY 53

**The Good, the Bad, and the Transcendent:
The Role of Women in the Old Testament**
KRISTI KAY BROSMER 58

Vincent van Gogh
CASSANDRA HINE 67

Dublin through the Eyes of Dubliners: The Inescapable City
BRENDA LIKAVEC 75

**Sources and Symbols: A Study Of
Brian Depalma's *Phantom Of The Paradise***
BRENDA LIKAVEC 83

ART & PHOTO CREDITS

DAVID BADGER x, 30, 52

NANCY C. HOWELL 20, 50

MATTHEW R. KOMINIAREK cover, iii, 2, 32, 90

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS 91



David Badger

Fiction

ROBERT D. COX

ARTHUR J. CURRY



Matthew R. Kominiarek

ROBERT D. COX



My Elderly Angel

I first saw her in the parking lot as I searched for a parking space. She was shuffling along at a pace that seemed normal for women of advanced years. Her gray parka matched the miserable sky, and her scarf seemed to have been made from the surrounding bright snow. She seemed to contrast: on the one part she was dull and washed out, on the other she shone solemnly. She was a solitary figure, and I smirked admiringly at her lonesome determination.

Finally a glorious void appeared and I parked my '83 Volvo in it. I clicked off the ignition and sat there as the car tinked and clicked in the cool morning air.

"How ironic," I thought, "that I would actually desire a void after living and feeling one for so long."

My eyes dropped a bit at that realization. A void. Is that what I've been living? Is that my life right now? Empty? Barren?

I had lost my faith—in everything. Goodness, people, God—especially God. How could He allow others to go through pain like me—hell, *screw* the others, how could He let *me* go through this? What in the hell is the point in that?

Deep questions. Even deeper answers.

I had awakened this morning with a zillion of these answerless riddles and decided to go to the one place that might shine some light on me, at least re-energize me.

So here I am at church.

I had arrived late and quickly scanned the pews for a seat in the back. I found it, hidden in the right corner, and I quickly made my way to it and sat down. One of the deacons was doing a scripture reading or something—I couldn't really concentrate. I was thinking of Helena, my wife—my EX-wife. Helena had filed for divorce about four months ago, and we finalized it last week.

It hurt.

We had been married six years, and even though that doesn't seem like a long time, it was. It was enough time for me to grow accustomed to her perfume—not the store-bought stuff but *her*, Eau d'Helena. She had a great scent. Six years was enough time for me to learn that ten clicks on the volume control was as high as I was allowed to go. Most importantly, it was enough time for me to expect to and excite myself every day about spending my life with her. It was a decision I made on our wedding day and one whose conviction kept building inside of me every day since. I loved her, I *love* her, and I fear I always will.

Could somebody please park a 1996 Oldsmobile Happiness in this empty heart parking space, please?

I became aware of the organ music as everyone stood to sing a hymn I never heard of before. I hate those. You try to sing along, but the fact is that you just don't know the song. You miss countless notes at the worst times—they go high, you go low, and, embarrassingly enough, they go low and quiet as you sing high and loud. It makes you feel like everyone is thinking, “Who's the tone deaf idiot? I wish he'd SHUT UP!” I've learned, though: I don't sing at all anymore.

As I stood there, humming quietly and incorrectly, I noticed that the old woman was situated in the pew in front of me at the far left side, near the middle aisle. She was sitting but singing proudly.

“How sweet,” I thought and actually smiled.

She must have been at least eighty years old, as her deeply lined face could attest. Her hair was a glowing white that contrasted with her navy dress. The same contrasts that I saw outside, as I glimpsed her walking, were there; but her earlier solemn shining was more defined and pronounced as she seemed to be . . . angelic. An old woman, singing her heart out for God. She made me jealous. Her faith was obviously deeply ingrained in her heart, and she knew exactly what to expect from and give to Him. She *knew*. She had an idea. I, on the other hand, was lost and clueless. Faithfully speaking, I was the questioning and needy babe and she was the knowledgeable and nurturing mother. I wish she'd teach me what He was thinking.

The congregation stopped and seated themselves once again. The preacher, I think he was the preacher, got up and started to sermonize to

his captive audience. The reason why I didn't know anyone at this church was that I had never been here before. Anytime I want to go to church I just drive around and pick one that looks good and go in. I like it; I think it keeps religion fresh. My wife hated this practice. My EX-wife, that is.

Helena hated a lot of the things that I liked. My job (a teacher), my writing, my friends, and my remote control habit—I clicked too much. One day, three months ago, she told me, in a subtle way, that she was unhappy. She said, “I don't love you and I don't want to be with you.” Period. Now, I have gotten the wind knocked out of me plenty of times playing basketball: your chest feels as if it is squeezing your guts out, and the air around you seems to be like a too-big bite of cheeseburger you can't swallow. This was different, though. In addition to all of the above was the sound of tearing as the part of my heart that was Helena was slowly being removed. Painfully.

She told me a few other things as well. Like how she was going to take as much from me as she could (as if that really mattered to me), how Jim was the love of her life, and how I could keep “that crappy old junker Volvo.” I almost laughed out loud at her attempt to sneak the “Jim” part into her tirade. Who the hell was Jim? She said he was Jim Howard, a math teacher at the same university where I taught. Given that info, I collapsed. I had known him; we spoke often at lunch and even played tennis a time or two. Jim . . . that back-stabbing bastard.

After seeing how distraught I was, Helena snorted in triumph and chimed as she walked out of the door, “You'll hear from my lawyer soon.”

How nice. How goddamned trite. God sure did make people great. He gave them eyes, ears, heart, lungs, and the ability to rip someone's life to pieces. All the good stuff. I felt so betrayed. My wife, the woman I pledged my life to, walked away from me. The man she was walking hand in hand with was a colleague of mine that I considered a nice acquaintance and budding friend. And overseeing all this, actually orchestrating it, was God. Good ol' God . . . my Buddy. Thus, it is easy to see my lack of faith in goodness, people, and God. They've all betrayed me.

I glanced at the old woman again. She sat intently, listening to the sermon I was ignoring. Listening to every word the preacher spewed out about a loving and beneficent higher being. I had made myself so angry thinking about Helena and my loss, that I considered getting up and

leaving the church. It seemed that I had allowed the misery that was found in the weather outside of these four walls to follow me inside. What was the point? God never ended up being helpful anyway—look at what He's done for me.

Just as I was about to leave, though, at the instant I began to reach for my coat, something happened. The old woman turned in her seat towards me and . . . smiled. Then she looked away. I had that breathless feeling again as I considered that smile from a woman of many years sitting alone who didn't even know me. Why did she do it? Was it for me? It must have been because nobody else was sitting near me. Then why?

I composed myself and gave up on leaving. I stared at this woman in awe. A stranger had kept me from storming out of the presence of God, maybe forever, with a simple smile, and I had no idea as to why it cemented me to my seat. Maybe it was the kindness I saw there. A kindness that undoubtedly was bred by a nurturing mother and spread amongst grandchildren and others. I could just envision her baking chocolate chip cookies for hours just in anticipation of her grandchildren coming over. I'd bet that she gave those children the same type of smile that she had just given me. She was a woman of much love and caring, and she distributed those gifts to everyone. I found myself smiling. Finally, a good person. Two institutions that I had given up on: goodness and people. She seemed to personify goodness. In the instant that she smiled at me, I saw a beautiful woman—in all ways. Her wrinkles smoothed and her love radiated. She was a woman without worry. A woman of courage. She must be courageous since she came to church alone on a snowy, cold December day. She really loved God, I guess, and the people around her.

Why was she alone though? My smile faded with that thought as the congregation bowed to pray. I watched her bow her frail head and fold her ancient hands. I glimpsed a wedding ring and I thought I knew something else about her. She seemed the type that married for pure love—something not always done today. She must have maintained that love for many years. The fact that she continued to wear the ring showed that she still carried that love with her. The fact that she was alone showed that she no longer had her husband with her on earth. They must have cherished one another every day until, one day, he left to wait for her at the gates of heaven. This woman was carrying on, still going to church and still giving

love. Only now her husband received her love through quiet nighttime conversations and lonely bedside prayers.

I blinked as the preacher closed the prayer and was surprised to find my vision blurry and my eyes wet. I wiped away my budding tears for this lonely, but courageous old woman, and, as I did, I saw her pull a handkerchief from her purse and wipe her own salty precipitation away. She had been crying too—over what, I didn't know. Maybe her lost love—a husband gone. The fact that she wiped her hurt away at the same time as I did was amazing. What a coincidence! First a smile at the precise moment I needed it, and then a mutual wiping away of hurt. It was as if a message was being sent to me. From God? Maybe.

I could feel my spirits being buoyed, and, for the first time in a long time, I felt that God cared. He seemed to know that I hurt, and so he sent me to His house to find this wonderfully inspiring old woman to restore my faith.

The congregation stood and began to sing another hymn I didn't know. I thought about the morning. I was lucky. Yes, *lucky*. I was alone, but the person I had loved didn't die, she left. She didn't love me, and I didn't need a person like that in my life. God was removing the people from my life who would only bring me down and keep me from being happy. I still had love to give to someone, and, because I was young, I had time to find the right someone. The old woman gave me hope. Most importantly she gave me my faith back. After all that she had been through, she still had a warm smile and a gracious love to spread to everyone.

I began to sing as loudly as ever. I went low when everyone else went high, and I sang high and loud when everyone else sang low and quietly. It didn't bother me, though. Life was good; and when it was bad, it was still good because it was Life. Tomorrow would always come and bring with it new experiences and challenges and pleasures. The sun would always shine, the wind would always blow, and every once in a while an earthly angel would smile and give hope. Life would always go on.

As the song and subsequently the service finished, I turned to find the old woman—but she was gone. “She must have left to beat the crowd of the congregation,” I thought. I wanted to talk to her, to take her to lunch and take away some of her loneliness. I wanted to learn about this sweet old

woman's life and see if I could help her as she so unknowingly, yet so profoundly, helped me.

I hurried outside and searched for her, but she was nowhere to be seen. The sun had broken through, and the day was no longer miserable. Neither was I. I wanted to find that woman badly so I could at least tell her "thank you." I waited by the doors, but, after everyone left, I had still not found her. Thoughts of angels-from-above and miracles entered my mind, but I swatted them away. That stuff only happened in movies and bad stories. She *did* seem to be too good to be true, though.

I walked to my car briskly and disappointedly but still with a smile on my dopey face. People must have laughed and snickered to see me, but I didn't care. I had a new outlook on things. As I got into the gloriously "junky" Volvo, I thought about the angel stuff again. It could be that God saw that I needed help in my life, a slight nudge, and sent down one of his heavenly hosts to aid me. It *could* be. Stranger things *have* happened. Maybe.

I smiled again as my car roared to life, happy with my own personal miracle. That is what it must have been. She had appeared just in time to save me and, after doing so, returned without a trace to her home in heaven. Not totally without a trace, however. I would always remember her. I backed out of my "void" and actually yelled "Hallelujah!" as I began to leave the lot.

I was much too wrapped up in my thoughts and myself as I began to turn onto the road, for I didn't notice the large black Cadillac speeding towards me. I saw it just in time and slammed on my brakes as the Caddy did the same. After the bellowing cacophony ended, we both sat there, inches from a collision, and I looked at the other driver to see with whom I was dealing. My mouth dropped open as I saw that the "other" was the old woman! I could not believe my eyes! There she was, not in heaven as I had begun to think but right there in front of me, real as could be.

My elderly angel.

I smiled sheepishly and shrugged my shoulders in true apologetic form to beg her forgiveness of my thoughtless driving.

She gave me a devilish look and flipped me off as she went screeching away.

ROBERT D. COX



Different Day, Same Son

The morning and the driver were different. One was bright and promising while the other seemed overcast with thunderclouds of anger. Matt's ticked-off countenance served as the indicator as to which was which as he barreled down the interstate, irritated that the sun seemed to mock his foul mood with its cheeriness.

The traffic was light and he made good time as he pushed the old Escort to the brink of death by lethal vibration. How the car held together seemed to be a mystery to everyone but Matt. He knew that the car refused to die so that he would never have an excuse to buy a new one. It knew that Matt was thrifty and would never walk away from something if it were still useful. The car, to Matt, was thumbing its nose at him big-time—just like the day around him.

"What the hell am I doing," he muttered to himself while reaching for a tug of coffee. It was from the night before but he didn't care. The caffeine didn't just disappear after it went cold did it? Still useful.

The needle on the speedometer wavered past ninety mph, as a new vibration seemed to take the car over.

Matt thought about how he could squeeze every bit of utility out of this trip. He could get the tires balanced at his dad's friend's tire shop, for cheap, he could check in with some old buddies, and he could probably pick up some Beanie Babies for cheap for his girlfriend—no that was too endearing, how about sex-friend? Better. Quickly this trip to his parents' house was taking on some usefulness, much in contrast with the actual visitation with them. That part of the trip had no utility whatsoever.

"Why visit?" he thought.

Matt's mood soured to a point equal to the thick coffee he had just sipped. The waste of gas money, alone, was enough of a reason not to go. Take that plus the time at work he was missing, and the trip should have been cancelled before it was planned. Pointless and wasteful.

If it hadn't been for his mom's incessant and annoying sobs on the phone, Matt would never have come. But hey, even *he* had pity (he definitely had pity) and if someone who "loved" him, even if it is his parents, wants to see him after six years, then why not grant the wish? The few hundred dollars spent could be recovered somehow. Maybe by laying a guilt trip on his dad so the old guy would give him the cash.

Matt smirked at that proposition and made a mental note of it. "Mental note." The thought of the two words quickly removed the smart-ass smile from his face and returned him to the depths of anger he had been accustomed to on this trip.

His dad was notorious for making "mental notes." The problem was that the man's mental clipboard was "dry-erase" and someone was continually wiping it off. "Mental notes" became "I forgots" and "Slipped my minds." That or they were casually dismissed when they were deemed by his "highness" as not being important or useful to leading a good life. A good life included hard work, no play, little time with friends, and an eternal life of serfdom to the king. *That* was a "good life."

"Bullshit!" Matt yelled to an old granny driving at fifteen miles below the speed limit. She didn't hear him as he shimmered by like an angry heat wave.

Summers were spent working around the house and weekends during school were similar to the summer. While friends were heading out to get some color at the beach, he was tanning with a rake in his hand. As his buddies sweated to the tune of basketball and football, Matt dripped saltwater to the cacophony of shovels in dirt, hammers on nails, and saws through wood. This "good life" was less life and more existence to Matt. He stumbled through summers and autumns and winters and springs without really noticing the changes that took place in each season. He did, though, notice the changes in the farm around him and himself. He became more and more overtaken with the yearning for escape, the hope for something better.

Matt didn't know what the hell they were expecting. He hadn't changed his mind at all about things. It may seem to be a different day but he was the same son. The same son.

The eleven o'clock sun remained happy, and Matt was just wishing that he could reach out and choke it into night. The only good part about

the journey so far was the fact that he was almost “home,” only one hour away, and thus almost ready to leave and go back to his real home on campus. He began seeing familiar surroundings, farms that he had passed frequently on weekend excursions and towns that he was only too happy to pass through in a blink. These were dilapidated old embarrassments to society that were only referred to as being towns because of the fact that they had a diner and a gas station. Towns. What a joke. To think that some losers living in this area thought that these places of “commerce” were big and important was a laugh. They were all the same: city wannabes that only idiots like Matt’s father would enjoy spending time in. These inhabitants didn’t realize that there was so much more to find, so much more to experience than farming and sleeping. Matt would not get caught in their hell, their ignorant hell, that they didn’t realize was a waste of life. He would not.

“No fuckin’ way,” Matt muttered.

He remembered the first time he had used that word in front of his father. It was his senior year of high school, and it had earned him a slap across the face and a bloody nose. The slap and the blood didn’t bother Matt at all. Hell, he even thought that he might have deserved it in a way. It was the lack of conversation afterwards that was the worst. The grudge that his dad held against him. The grunting answers to questions and the interminable lack of eye contact that followed for weeks. Matt had felt that he was alienated from the family and that feeling lingered and grew ever stronger. He didn’t need his dad’s shit or his attitude. For all he cared, his father could go to hell.

Matt couldn’t say he hated his family, but he disliked them profusely. In short, he wanted nothing to do with them. Especially his father. Matt didn’t know why, but he kind of pitied his old man. The guy would never realize what a jerk he was and how much his own son didn’t want to be around him. You would think that after six years of Matt not coming around, his father would have started to get the hint. He must not have, though, as here Matt was turning into a familiar driveway, seeing familiar barns and picket fences, glaring at a harsh white farmhouse that glared right back at him.

Matt could see the curtain of the kitchen window flutter and he knew his mom was looking out at him. The Escort whispered “Thank You” as he

clicked off the ignition. Matt just sat there in the car, taking deep breaths (that never seemed to work), angry but afraid, not knowing what kind of reception to expect. The front door opened and Matt's mother stood there, watching him watch her, waiting. No dad in sight. Typical.

"Alright, here we go."

Matt got out of the cooling, grateful Escort and sauntered towards the front porch. His mom smiled, slightly. Matt didn't. The second step of the stairs squeaked its usual welcome (still hadn't been fixed), and finally Matt was standing in front of his mother. She looked the same. The whole place looked the exact same way he had seen it six years ago.

Neither person made any motion. His mom just looked into his eyes with her half-smile.

"Maybe I should just shake her hand," Matt thought and chuckled once.

His mother must have thought this a good sign as she gave him a fierce embrace and sobbed into Matt's shoulder. Matt reluctantly hugged her back but did not cry.

"I have missed you so-oh much, honey," his mother cried, "so much."

They stood there, hugging, one crying, one not, until Matt asked if they could go inside. She said yes and that she would pour him some coffee as she led him to the kitchen.

Matt remarked to himself how the house had not changed in the least over the years. Same TV, same couch, same smell, same lack of a real father. He must be out doing chores or something "good" and "right" because, hey, those who are idle are evil. Amazing that his old man couldn't take a little break to see his son, whom he hasn't seen in six years. Not that amazing, really. Just typical.

His mother put a cup of hot coffee in Matt's hands and he took a sip. Decent stuff, not great, but okay. Same old cups, though, same old kitchen.

Matt looked around and was punched with a fistful of memories. The corner he had to stand in time after time for breaking a rule. The sink where he would do dishes three times a week. The kitchen table where he and his parents would have dinner and fight over what Matt had done wrong that particular day. Anger welled up in Matt again as he decided to get to the point—just standing here was a waste of time.

"So what did you guys want?"

Matt's mother was surprised at the bluntness of the question and stared at her son with a shocked expression. Then she remembered whom she was talking to and regained her composure.

"Matt, we've missed you, and now that you're here we're just so glad to see you, honey."

Matt's face turned red, "We? We? Mom, I only see *you* here. Dad's not even here, so don't speak for him. You always do that!" He walked to the kitchen window, "Don't put words in his mouth or try to make up for his faults. Stop it! He was always the one who hurt me, who punished me, and you were always the one to apologize, though you did nothing to stop it. I'm sick of it!"

His outburst filled the room and the quiet seemed to ring. Matt tried to calm down.

"Mom, he's not even here. He couldn't even show up when I got here. I can see he hasn't changed at all."

Matt leaned against the counter and drank his coffee. Things hadn't changed at all. He'd noticed it from the time he pulled up in his car to now. Everything was the same.

"Matt," his mother said so softly that it demanded his attention, "your father is here. He's waiting for you upstairs. He couldn't come down."

What a jerk.

"What do you mean he couldn't come down? He couldn't face me? His damn pride wouldn't allow him to wait for me to show up? Damn mom! He sh—."

"He's had a stroke."

Matt stopped and nearly dropped his coffee mug. A stroke? His old man was only in his late fifties and strong as a mule. How could he have a stroke?

His mother continued, "It happened about a month ago, and it's crippled him. He can't walk, he can barely . . ." she began to weep again, and Matt made his way over to her, shocked. He put his hand on her shoulder. She composed herself.

"He can barely talk anymore. He pretty much lives in bed, and we have a nurse to help take care of him. I called you because I wanted you to see him before . . . well . . . the doctors let me take him home because . . .

Matt, he's dying."

This was too much for Matt as he stumbled back and slumped into a kitchen chair. He didn't know what to feel. Just five minutes ago he was thinking about what a jerk his old man was, and now the jerk was dying. How? Why? It couldn't be happening.

Matt lowered his eyes to the ground and then surprised even himself. He cried.

The tears sprang from a storm that had been raging for six years, and the dam finally was overcome by the emotional tempest. He felt his mother's hand on his back patting him, trying to soothe him, but it did no good.

Matt cried for the cruelty of nature. He cried for his mother and himself, but mostly he cried for his father. His dad. His old man. Matt pitied him, as he'd done so many times before but not in the same way this time. Matt pitied him not as a no-good father who didn't know any better, but as a dad who tried his best at being a parent who was now dying.

Matt thought of his own stubbornness over the last six years, and how he wouldn't allow himself to think of his dad as anything other than a waste of time. Useless. He cried harder as he realized how useful that period of time could have been if they had both tried to make it that way. It was the six years of life gone by that was now useless—useless and gone forever. Guilt, like a hot, searing blade of the sun cut into his chest, burning his heart, but reminding him that his emotional organ was still alive. He was not a good man, had not lived a good life, but what was worse was that he was a bad son. He had attempted to be a good person, though, just as his dad had tried to be a good parent. Only instead of recognizing and confronting their differences, the two men had hid from them and one another. Now time was running out.

Matt calmed himself down and stood up, blurry vision and all, and looked at his mother.

"Matt, honey, he wants to see you."

He stood there, not knowing what to do or say. Afraid to go upstairs to see his dad, afraid not to.

"Go on honey, please."

Matt walked out of the kitchen to the stairs and climbed to his father's room. A deep breath didn't help as Matt opened the door and saw an old

man. His old man.

“Hi dad.”

. . .

The son awoke before the father did and walked outside the next morning. The dew was still on the grass and a light fog hung in the air. As he walked down the stairs, the son received the usual good morning squeak and he made his way toward the barn. Tears were blinked away as he began the day's chores under an awakening sun. Unlike yesterday, though, it seemed sad, dull, and not as bright. Something had changed.

In some ways it was the same kind of day as yesterday, only with a different sun. A different sun.

ARTHUR J. CURRY



Graduation

Graduation at Lagro High School has never been what you would call conventional. Between the pickup trucks, bib overalls, and work boots, you were more likely to think you were attending a tractor-pull than a commencement. Lagro was a wide spot along State Road 20 with not quite 400 occupants. School was something you attended in the winter when the fields were fallow, and few residents progressed much beyond ninth grade. This year, 25 of the town's finest were scheduled to graduate, the largest class in history.

It was a sticky, warm June night, and Eddie Robb knew he was going to be miserable inside that stuffy gymnasium. When he broke a sweat just pulling on his boots, he regretted, too late, the six beers he knocked back that afternoon. Eddie never felt comfortable stuck in a crowd. Now he was going to spend a long evening surrounded by overly friendly neighbors. It was worth the grief; no Robb had ever graduated before.

Eddie figured that his youngest son, Jimmy, would be the only Robb to graduate from this generation. The two older boys had not even come close. The teachers and the Robb boys, except for Jimmy, had an unspoken agreement. As long as they did not cause much trouble, the teachers would pretty much leave them alone—and pass them on to the next grade with little concern about scholastic abilities. Eddie thought this deal would have gotten them through, but it was not to be. Only Jimmy.

As Eddie struggled with his only sports coat, made for a man ten years younger and twenty pounds lighter, it became obvious that he would never be able to sit through the ceremony without a little more lubricant. He still had forty-five minutes before he had to be at the gym, and surely one more could not hurt. He was not going to drive; it was only a ten-minute walk across town.

He opened the refrigerator searching for comfort, but the boys had already gotten the twelve Stroh's he stored there last night. "Forgodsakes,

the dumb broad can't even keep the brats out of my beer." Eddie sighed as he remembered Wanda had moved out weeks ago. A tinge of regret pierced the gray haze that shaded Eddie's world as he recalled Wanda.

If he left now, he could stop by the Legion and still make it to the gym in plenty of time. He checked himself once more in the mirror, wondering what Wanda ever saw in him, and started toward the door. The phone rang.

"Yeah?"

"Eddie, you up?" Wanda's voice smiled.

"Of course, I'm up, why?"

"Just checking. I don't want you to miss your big night."

"I won't. I was just on my way out the door. Besides, it's Jimmy's night, not mine."

She knew better. She knew he was probably more excited about tonight than Jimmy was.

"You want'a drop by later?" Wanda asked in a seductive whisper.

They were separated, but she still called once in a while. "I don't know. Probably not a good idea. I want'a be home when Jimmy comes in. Why not come to the graduation with me? Jimmy was always your favorite." He and Wanda had lived together six years. The first two or three were great, but then Shirley died, and the boys had come to live with him.

"This is for you and Jimmy. I'd only be a distraction. You enjoy tonight. I'm proud of both of you."

After the boys moved in, things had gotten and stayed rocky. Wanda was not in the mood to raise someone else's kids. Especially ones Shirley had poisoned on life, her, and mostly Eddie. He did not blame her, but what choice did he have? They started drifting apart after that. She finally decided to move out three months ago. Eddie saw her in town from time to time, usually with men younger than him. He wondered why she still bothered to call?

"I miss you, Eddie," she said sadly.

"I'll see, but no promises." As he hung up, he questioned why he left the door open. He could not see her. It was too hard. She would not come back, and he could not leave. It was easier to suffer without hope.

The door to the Legion slammed behind him as he made his way

toward his favorite stool in a dark corner behind the waitress station. Burt put the can of Stroh's on the bar at about the same time Eddie touched down.

"What are you doing here, Eddie?"

"What's it look like?"

"I mean, graduation starts in half an hour. Don't want to miss your big night."

Why did everyone think it was his big night? Can't a Robb graduate from high school without everyone making a big deal out of it? "Not my night, it's Jimmy's."

"Sure, Eddie." Burt and everyone else in town knew what this night meant to Eddie. After his two older sons screwed up, Eddie put all his hopes and dreams in Jimmy. Jimmy was different. Paul and Jack were typical Lagro boys. Paul quit school after the 8th grade. Jack got thrown out after the 9th. Neither could hold even a part-time job for more than a few days. They were in and out of jail for mostly drinking and petty thefts, but once in awhile something a little more involved. Eddie didn't think it had gotten past a little pot, but he could not be sure.

Jimmy was not at the top of his class, but he worked at his studies. He was involved in school activities, worked part-time at Frank's gas station, and even went to Central Christian Church, although Sally Davis had a lot to do with that. For the most part, he managed to stay out of trouble. He even did well enough on his SATs to get accepted into Valparaiso University. He said he wanted to be an accountant. Eddie was dubious, but after following his brothers through school and overcoming their reputations, Eddie felt Jimmy would make it out of Lagro to somewhere and something better.

Eddie sat nursing his beer, thinking about Jimmy and his two older sons. Maybe it was not too late, but living in Lagro with a father who worked third shift, did not bode well for two troubled kids. Eddie was not even sure where they were. They had gone over to a friend's house that afternoon, with a promise to be back in plenty of time to attend graduation. They never returned, and Eddie could not remember where they said they were going. Eddie slid off the stool, fumbled in his pockets for a quarter, and made a call.

He let it ring six or seven times. No answer. "Those brats should be at

Jimmy's graduation." Eddie growled as he walked back to his stool.

The door opened as Eddie tucked himself in behind the waitress station. He could not see them, but from the look on Burt's face they were not regulars. Eddie glanced in the mirror and saw the reflection of the gun. Nobody said a word. They were kids standing there shaking like leaves. They had to be hotter than hell in those coats and ski masks. The apprehension in their stance alerted everyone that they were not yet sure this was a good idea.

"Money. I want all the money. Put it in the bag." The bigger one said, his voice breaking, as he threw a bag to Burt.

"Sure kid. No problem." Burt replied as he caught the bag and started emptying the cash register.

"The rest of you empty your pockets." The kid said gaining courage with each word.

Eddie knew the voice. He hated it. He stepped from behind the waitress station and both boys jumped back as if they had been shot. Tears welled up in Eddie's eyes. "There's gonna be no robbery here tonight. PUT-THAT-GUN-DOWN, and get the hell home—right now!"

The tall one drew the barrel of the gun off Burt and pointed it toward Eddie. His hands started to shake uncontrollably. The gun and the mirror behind Eddie's head exploded simultaneously. He dropped the gun and the two kids bolted through the door. Razor sharp slivers of mirror speckled Eddie's shoulders. Tiny beads of blood reflected off the shards like a macabre glitter. Eddie slumped to the floor.

Jimmy searched the audience as he walked across the stage. Sally Davis' parents waved and clapped as he received his diploma, but Eddie Robb was not there. He would never see one of his boys graduate.



Nancy Howell

Poetry and Poetics

MATTHEW R. KOMINIAREK

ROBERT D. COX

LESA M. COTTO

DORI SCHNICK

NANCY C. HOWELL

MATTHEW R. KOMINIAREK



Profit and Loss

Looking over
illuminated divinity
a fool finds
a place
recalled as familiar, but
known
to have been there
not knowing where
the maze of day anchors
fallen time of rest

on an icy haze
held high by roots exposed
moon lit inspiration
blankets leaves of light-
the fool's profit
finds no loss, speaking
of freedom and peace
of a place beyond
ties
past comprehension holding

on scriptures wavering ledge
the fool can keep still
no longer
image that
this is what it is

all about
scaling the wall yet higher in hope
higher
than the night before,
as the night
before the night
the way has been lost
once again

in the distance

on morning's bluff
the exhausted fool
turning with anticipation
for an answer to question found
the waning fortune-teller
swift brushing dawn's trees
as light takes chase
shaking the fool to the valley floor
with radiant vibration
following each step

ROBERT D. COX



Soulmate

A glance that
neither was
nor did.
A secret glimpse
neither found
nor hid.
In an instant,
a memory was born.
A forever conceived.
His eye quit,
as her eye caught,
and though the moment
ended,
an eternity
began.

LESA M. COTTO



Woman's Rites

Virgin in Spring veiled
Grasping pink bud
Marches toward sacrifice
Tiny fist belonging to
Infant rose pink, curled, closed
Clutches the smallest stem
Sucking
Dear life cut off
Sacrificed flowers
Offered maiden

One blood red bud
Opens sacrifice made
Awakened from within
The priestess' vigilance of
New life stirs future
Conceived dreams awaken
Sucking
Dear life ordained
Mother of mercy
Single rose

Summer leaves
Petals fall
Priestess duties performed
Stems unveiled
Life is roots
New generation assured
Sucking
Dear life from Earth
Petals fall
Elder born

DORI SCHNICK



My Momma

My Momma, she's sweet
She helps me out
Like, when I was a kid I would fall down on the
ground,
pavement, gravel whatever
She helped me git back up

I'm growed now
I still fall down sometimes, jist not like a little kid do
I found other ways ta fall or maybe theys found me
Anyhows, I fall alright
But my Momma, she's there
She lets me cry
Some people say, "You's a growed woman now, you
sho don't need ta be cryin like that."
But my Momma, she don't say them things
She lets me cry an cry an cry

Once I cried about this man
Oh, I teared myself up over a lotta men, but this one
was special
I caught him cheatin
Couldn't believe it
I 'as gonna marry him
I hit im an I was all angry
I had a right ta be angry
I musta had the right ta smack im too, cuz he didn't
call the po-lice on me
After it was over I went to my Momma's place down
the block

I toed her what happened
I cried whiles I was tellin it
My Momma cried too
I sho don't know why
Mebbe she liked the jerk, too

She likes me, tho
I know that
She don't tell me wit words or nuthin,
But when I's git lonely or tired
She comes up over ta my place
An bakes me dinner
An gives me a hug
She say, " No matter hows big you git, Chile, you
ain't never gonna be so big you caint
fit in yo momma's arms."

And Lordy do know hows I need those arms an hugs
From my Momma

NANCY C. HOWELL



Thoughts from a Reading

Writers innocently act as hosts, for they inevitably leave ajar the doors that protect their privacy. When readers are given an opportunity to assimilate shared experiences in a text, they become, at least partially, linked to the author. With Wallace Stevens's idiosyncratic utilization of syntax, his transformation of subjects and verbs in his poetry, and his speaking to the concept of belief in more than a few of his poems, however, the reader's encounter might become more intricately interior. The reader might experience, with the opening of one door, a progression of many doors opening, where may echo the sound of the first.

The poetry of Stevens is a collective tribute to any belief, or to the lack of it, depending upon the reader's personal encounter with each poem. Even though Stevens writes without the dogma that is traditional in religious poetry, he is masterful with religious image. With the subsequent reading of his poetry and, in particular, the religious quintessence of one of his less obscure poems, however, the concept of God becomes less a use of mere poetic image and more a choice. In "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Parmour," the reader might imagine that the writer speaks from the heart, finally admitting to a nascent understanding of what God might be. That ideal may be magnified when the reader has an opportunity to hear the poem.

With the transubstantiation of his words into sound, there is created the concept of a new Trinity. The listener is a witness with Stevens, becoming part of a whole, if intangible, substance. The Trinity becomes a rest for the eye, letting the ear gather three voices. There is the poet, who encounters the speaker in his own poem; the reader, who is giving voice to the poet; and the sound of the reader's voice itself, a quiet absorption in the spirit of the listener. The separate entities unite and gather into a wave that presses against the rock of the private shoreline, a rock that we, as human beings, may have set up as a barrier innocently hindering an understanding of what dwells within us.

Eavesdropping isn't rude when reading the printed word as it is intentionally published. As one listens to the poem, however, he or she might ponder Stevens's hands as they might have looked when he wrote "Soliloquy." That question might border on rudeness, for the writer's body language is epitomized in the hands and, often, the eyes. Did he slowly flex the fingers of his hands in mid-stanza, or did he suddenly grasp them closed, as persons do their eyes when faced with an awful ecstasy? Confirmed readers of Stevens might envision stigmata, as they imagine his palms revealing the result of his passion that he has so aptly strewn upon the page.

That Stevens considered the extinction of religious belief to be a crises of the imagination is no mystery, as the reader is exposed to the many stanzas referring to the mystery of God and the lack of God's influence. That premise is extrapolated in "Soliloquy." In fact the fifth stanza voices his concern as he states, "We say God and the imagination are one" and, as a result of his assertion, which may or may not be his own belief, he concludes, "How high that highest candle lights the dark." There seems to be no admitting on his part, when he begins with "We say," that God and the imagination are inseparable, though he appears to *want* to believe it. Either way, he is already bound by what many experience, in that there is often found an inner compass with something suddenly put nearer our grasp and forever burned into the emotion as a greater thing. More often it is something simple, as he writes of "a single shawl/Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,/A light, a power, the miraculous influence."

Finally, when Stevens begins the poem with "Light the first light of evening, as in a room," and ends it with the phrase "In which being there together is enough," Stevens positions the word "evening," to a related context, and thus connects it to the word "together." This forges God and the listener, each into the other, as one, to dwell "in the evening air."

The power of all art has, in its spontaneous immediacy, an ability to initiate a nascent perception of objects and ideas heretofore perceived. With what privacy is afforded to the eye the private epiphany may have its entrance there. When poetry is leveled at the ear, however, its transmutative capabilities may leave the listener wishing for solitude from the voice, for with sound "Soliloquy" becomes so totally interior, so private in its touch that some listeners may attempt to deny the eclipse of the ear and the heart. They will need their own prayer. There is no where to hide from his poem.



David Badger

Personal Essays

DAVID RILEY

CHRIS MILLER

CHRIS WOLFENBARGER

SALLIE E. JOHNSON

CASSANDRA HINE



Matthew R. Kominiarek

DAVID RILEY



Pain, Hate, and Disrespect

As a criminal and one of society's castoffs, I find myself often unable to deal with people on a personal or professional level. I am what can best be described as anti-social, and only recently have I discovered the reason for this behavior. I have little or no respect for people, especially persons of authority. I tend to relish the conflicts this behavior tends to create, for I am a rebel without a cause. There is no glamour in my rebellion, not even illusions of grandeur, only pain and a trail of self-destructive acts, because it is life that I've rebelled against.

As children, we are supposed to be taught a set of morals, values, and concepts that supposedly will help us make sound decisions as we grow into adulthood. One of the basic, yet extremely important concepts, is to respect our parents, elders, and especially authority figures. I was not taught by my parents morals, values, or concepts of this nature. Instead, I was taught the opposite. I was encouraged to distrust and hate authority figures, especially law enforcement officials and teachers. It was this lack of respect that would end up causing me numerous conflicts with school officials and police. It also caused me much pain and grief and led me to inflict suffering upon the people who were close to me.

My parents were both abusers of drugs and alcohol. Neither had finished high school, and both were too young and too immature to attempt the child-raising process. My mother was fifteen years old when she gave birth to me, and she bore seven children by the age of twenty-three. Dysfunctional does not seem adequate to describe our family.

Our home was a hangout for addicts, alcoholics, and most of the town's criminal element. There were always fights and clashes with the police, and as a child I learned to emulate the disrespect the authorities were shown at our house. My mother once explained to me that the police hated and harassed us because she had married a black man (my mother is white). On those occasions when my stepfather was arrested for disor-

derly conduct or public intoxication, I didn't see the police as doing their job. I saw them as the enemy trying to take my stepfather from me because he was black. So when the inevitable clashes with the police occurred, I was right there with everyone else, cursing and throwing bottles and rocks at the officers.

Teachers were also the enemy. My mother was always ripping up my homework assignments and telling me that my teachers were trying to brainwash me. Why? As I stated earlier, my mother did not attend high school, and, furthermore, she was barely literate. I believe that her lack of education was something that she was not able to come to terms with, and that it was compounded by the fact that she had severe psychological problems. She was, and still is, under the care of a psychiatrist, and she has a magic pill for every problem life tosses her way. My mother was the reason I was so disruptive in grade school. My teachers were afraid of my mother and, therefore, were afraid to discipline me. A spanking was sure to result in my mother storming the school and physically assaulting the teacher in question. It is no wonder that, of my mother's seven children, not one completed high school; and as adults, only one of us obtained a G.E.D. We were destined for academic failure because we were not taught to respect our teachers.

My parents did not respect anyone outside of their circle, and, as strange as it may seem, my parents were my heroes. I couldn't do any wrong in their eyes as long as I was doing wrong. I was also treated like a prince by their friends. The drunks would always give me money and alcohol, and the addicts kept me supplied with drugs. My own friends envied me, and this gave me a false sense that my parents and I were special. By the age of twelve I had smoked pot, drunk alcohol, participated in riots, and had sex. I was my parents' little prince, and my kingdom was a yard littered with whiskey bottles, beer cans, and syringes.

A lot of people don't realize how important respect, or lack thereof, is. It can either reinforce the foundation that we build our lives upon, or it can demolish that foundation and leave us stranded in a sea of negativity. One example to illustrate my observation comes from a childhood trauma. Just a few weeks shy of my thirteenth birthday I caught my stepfather raping one of my sisters, who was his biological daughter. I knew that what he was doing was wrong, but I was powerless to stop him. I also lost

respect for him as a father figure and as a guardian. I could not bear to look at my sister afterwards because I could see so much pain in her eyes. I couldn't sleep at night because my dreams were haunted by her screams and unanswered pleas for help. I lost respect for myself because I was her big brother, and I had failed to protect her.

I ran away from home shortly afterwards and lived on the streets until I was finally caught. The police officer who picked me up was familiar with who I was and who my parents were. I had played on a baseball team he had coached the summer before, and he was a regular at our home during our numerous disturbances. I knew him well enough to tell him about my stepfather's assault on my sister. This resulted in my stepfather being arrested and my being placed in an emergency foster home. My reprieve was short-lived, however, because my stepfather was immediately released from jail and allowed to go back to the house, the very place where he had committed his atrocity. I later learned that my mother went to the jail and raised so much of a fuss proclaiming his innocence that he was allowed to make bond.

Sitting alone on my foster parents' porch, I did not feel like a prince anymore. My kingdom had been turned upside down, and for the first time in my young life I was frightened. Fear was a new emotion for me, one that I could not reconcile. The thing that frightened me the most was my mother's reaction to the incident.

Even though I was in a foster home, I did not change schools or miss the following day. At 8:00 a.m., the day after my father's arrest and subsequent release, I was back in school; however, I found it hard to concentrate because I couldn't take my mind off the fact that the authorities did not keep my stepfather locked up. Everytime the door to my classroom opened, my heart skipped a beat and I held my breath expecting my stepfather to storm in and have his revenge on me. He never showed up, but when the 3 o'clock bell rang signaling the end of the school day, I did have cause for concern. My foster mother had promised to pick me up from school, but the first car I saw parked in front of the school was my father's.

I stood paralyzed on the steps as the driver's side door opened, but my paralysis quickly lifted as I watched my mother emerge from the car. I ran to her not knowing about her episode at the police station after my

stepfather's arrest. I expected her to greet me with open arms, but the greeting I received was a vicious slap in the face. I stood shocked as my mother then proceeded to beat me and denounce me. She called me a liar and shouted to everyone that my stepfather would never hurt one of his children. It took several teachers and my foster mother, who had pulled up just as the assault began, to pull my mother off me. They succeeded in pulling her away and placing her back in my stepfather's car. As my mother drove off, I remember my shock giving way to anger.

As my foster mother wiped the blood from my battered face, it occurred to me who was really to blame for my sister's assault. My mother. You see at the time of the assault my mother was having an affair with another man. It was common knowledge to everyone in town that she was unfaithful to my stepfather. He also knew of the affair, and it caused him to drink more and made him crueler, cruel enough to rape his own daughter. I concluded that my mother's episode in front of the school was her way of denying that she had let her children down. I believe that she realized that had she been home being a wife to her husband and a mother to her children, the incident might not have happened. My mother is a master of misdirection.

As the days passed, I was still numbed by the fact that the authorities had let my sister and me down, despite the fact that a medical exam had shown my sister had been sexually assaulted, and she had named her attacker. The combination of my mother beating and denouncing me, my stepfather being free to assault my sister again, as well as my fear of his coming after me for exposing him, brought me much grief. Somewhere inside of my mind a dam broke spewing forth a river of distrust and anger.

My initial reaction was to lash out at everyone around me, especially all grown-ups. I was such a disruptive force in my foster home that my foster parents, who were good people, had me taken away. So began my odyssey of disrespect and distrust. I would not allow myself to be placed in a situation where I had any reliance on grown-ups. It was a situation compounded by my lack of self-respect. To this day, twenty-two years later, I still do not respect authority figures, and I do not respect myself. I've rebelled against life itself because I don't respect anything, and because at night when I close my eyes, I can still hear my sister's screams.

CHRIS MILLER



My Home

I stood in the sand circle, known as the batter's box, as a feeble-bodied nine year old. In my head, I've already seen the ball leave a yellow trail as it flies over everyone's heads, over the water-filled ditch, past the street, and into Mr. Cavender's yard (the nine-year-old equivalent of a 500-foot home run). With a self-assured smile, I looked around and saw my whole world: the beat up old merry-go-round, the half-dead climbin' tree that seemed to stretch to the top of the world, and old Mr. Cavender across the street playing his guitar on the porch, completely unaware of the shot I'm about to unleash in his direction.

I turned and saw my dad watching from his lawn chair, beer in hand, with his eyebrows raised in a proud look, as though he too knew what I was about to do. I acknowledged him with a nod, like I was Babe Ruth calling his shot in Yankee Stadium. I took a step out of the batter's box, breathed a melodramatic sigh, and hit the bottom of my shoes with the bat, which was completely unnecessary, but seemed to somehow build the drama. I stepped back into the box and took my awkward batting stance which was modeled after that of my favorite player, Andre "The Hawk" Dawson of the '88 Cubs.

I mustered up the most intimidating stare I could and directed it towards my best friend Rob. With an uneasy look on his face he stood tall on the flat worn out patch of grass known ironically enough as the pitcher's mound. In his right hand he held a dingy yellow tennis ball, stained from being left in the ditch for a few days and used so we wouldn't break out a window again. I was about to slam it into the stratosphere.

He leaned back into his exaggerated motion and released a slow rainbow pitch. I felt the energy rise inside me as the ball came towards me. I closed my eyes and swung the dented old bat for all I was worth, turning my body completely around. I felt no impact, no mammoth shot. "Could it be that I actually missed it?" I asked myself. My suspicions were con-

firmed when I heard the tennis ball ricochet off the teeter-totter. I watched in horror as it slowly rolled back onto the field.

I stood in disbelief as Rob celebrated, and the winners seemed to taunt me with the glory they had stolen from me. Adrenaline surged throughout my body as I ran towards Rob. Overtaken by envy, the humiliation of being struck out, and the realization that my fantasy didn't come true, I drew back and threw a punch with everything I had. This time I knew I had connected by the blood that trickled from Rob's nose. Quickly, I grabbed him and dashed him to the ground. I hurriedly pinned his arms down with my knees and threw several punches at his face. I thought he's had enough, so I hopped off him. He ran to his house, blood and tears streaming down his face, and quickly ducked inside.

I was left to bask in my own glory as all my friends and I relived the fight blow by blow (each time the stories became more and more incredible). My joy ended when I saw Rob's mom step out of the house, trailed by Rob holding a Kleenex up to his bloodied nose. I turned and sprinted towards my house, for I knew that his mother would be coming over to talk to mine. I burst through the door and blurted out, "I didn't do it, Mom," between strained breaths. My mother looked out the window, saw Rob and his mother approaching the house, and dragged me outside by my shirt to meet them.

"Tell me what happened, boys," she said with a look that frightened me more than a thousand wooden spoons. Both Rob and I told our stories, which were very far apart in both accuracy and who was to blame. When we were done, my mom commanded, "You boys shake hands and say you're sorry." As I approached Rob, I felt warm tears running down my red cheeks. I grasped his hand and shook it vigorously. We both turned and walked towards the park talking like nothing ever happened. We saw all the gathered boys trying to watch the scene in my front yard and chattering like little girls do about boys. "Are we gonna play some ball or what?" I shouted. Everyone ran back to where they were before the fight, and no one spoke another word of it.

We played until the sun sank behind that familiar patch of trees we called "The Woods," squeezing every minute we could out of the fleeting daylight. As I looked up at the sky, I knew it would end soon. The number of players got fewer and fewer as the sun went down, as though the sun

was taking them with it. I knew that soon my mother would peek her head out the door and call, "Chrissstopher Robbbbinnn," with her distinctive Southern drawl, which elicited a few laughs and brought about my swift denial of Robin being my middle name. We played, right down to the last two of us, savoring every moment until the sun disappeared beneath that familiar horizon.

These people I grew up with, the people I shared so many years and memories with, they are my family. My neighborhood, the old trees, the park, my fort, these places where I was at my happiest, they are my home.

At the time, it seemed like those days would never end, like we'd all stay the same forever; but, like all children, we've changed, grown up, and grown apart. Rob has gone off to the Marines, I'm going to college and working full time, and things will never be the same again.

Sometimes when I come home late at night, I take an extra lap around the block, reliving memories of the people I call my family and the place I call home. I almost feel like I'm there again, nine years old and stepping into the batter's box. Then I realize that you can never truly go back home. Home is only a memory fading quickly in the rear-view mirror, as we wipe the fog from the window and watch helplessly from the back seat.

CHRIS WOLFENBARGER



A Family Ritual Worth Repeating

Almost everyone thinks of something completely different when asked about their definition of home. One way to define “home” is to think back on your childhood and remember occasions, events, or rituals that you shared with your family. For me, this is the only way to examine my definition of home because home only exists in my memory now. My favorite way to remember home is the family Christmas parties that we used to have.

Christmas was always a very special time for my family when I was young, and it continues to be so now for my children and me. I came from an extremely large family. My parents gave me nine older siblings—lucky me. My father was one of fifteen children, so he thought that was how large all families should be. The measure of a man was determined by how many children he could produce. When I was young, there was no shortage of aunts and uncles. The ritual every year, anyway, was for my dad’s entire family, and a few of my mom’s family members, to gather at my parents’ home on Christmas Eve for food, drink, stories, and gift exchange. There were also those few family friends who showed up because they considered themselves to be members of the family. One particular Christmas when I must have been about eight years old I remember best.

All the food and beverages had to be prepared and set out before the whole family descended upon us, which was usually about one o’clock in the afternoon. This meant, of course, that my mom was at my bedroom door at the crack of dawn with the morning whistle, requesting my presence in the kitchen before the swarm of family arrived.

My presence was required in the kitchen because I was the gopher girl. While my mom was making the icing for her German chocolate cake, I was to get each vegetable out of the refrigerator, wash them, peel the carrots, and set them all on the table. In between washing vegetables, I would have to climb up to the top shelf of the spice cabinet to get the vanilla and

whatever else my mom couldn't reach. My mom was only five feet tall, so there were quite a few things that she couldn't reach.

Mom had to make the icing and then get out of Dad's way in the kitchen; he would continue the preparations after her part was done. She used the biggest cast iron skillet we had in order to make the icing because her German chocolate cake was three layers high. Still, the cake scarcely fed the large quantity of people who were going to be there. The cake was always one of the first things to be eaten.

After she finished the cake, she would sit at the dining room table and assemble a beautiful tiered relish tray with all of our favorites, such as black and green olives, every kind of pickle there is, and banana peppers, mild and hot; a cheese tray with all kinds of cheese in cubes, sticks, and slices; and a meat tray with rolled ham slices and pieces of homemade salami. It was also my job to put the extra cut-up food in containers and put them in the fridge so that we would have them ready for refilling when the trays got low.

Meanwhile, my dad worked diligently in the kitchen on the main dish. Every year he concocted some new and "exciting" dish to "broaden our taste." That year he assured my mom that everyone would love the main dish because it was one of his specialties, hot beef sandwiches. My mom was relieved to hear the good news. Everyone loved his hot beef in mushroom gravy on bread. He neglected to tell her, however, that he wasn't using his usual cut of beef.

The preparations always took us at least until noon to finish. No sooner would we be done, then the family would start pouring in. It was so exciting to see everyone again and to catch up on all the missed news and latest gossip. The chitchat started in the breezeway as soon as the door was opened. I believe the gossip that year was about two of our distant cousins who were about to be married ... to each other. Everyone scarcely had their coats off before they would have a plate in hand, ready to chow down on all the food set out buffet style.

My dad went from family member to family member and asked how everyone liked the hot beef sandwiches. Of course, everyone praised him for a most excellent meal. Now was the time that he dropped the bomb-shell. Dad led everyone to the kitchen. He looked quite proud of himself. He lifted the lid to the cooker to reveal the most hideous sight anyone could

imagine. There, in the succulent brown mushroom gravy lay a bumpy, slimy, piece of a cow's tongue. Needless to say, there were so many sick people after that wonderful sight that we were praying for outhouses. From that day forth, my mother was in charge of most of the food preparation for our parties.

In the late afternoon and early part of the evening, my dad would start mixing the drinks. He had every kind of pop, juice, and liquor known to man ready to be mixed. He liked to see how strong he could make the drinks while still keeping them palatable, and he could also sneak in a couple of belts for himself by taste-testing. I remember going from room to room sampling drink after drink and sitting in on all the different stories that were being told.

Some of them were oldies but goodies, but others were stories that I had never heard before. One of the old stories that we heard year after year was about a time when my dad was young, and his family had moved into someplace that they called the switch. The switch was actually an old train station. My dad, aunts and uncles, all told the story together. They would tell about how the snow was so deep that they couldn't possibly walk all the way to school, so they would skip school and play in the snow. Throwing snowballs at people and cars was what they were really doing. I remembered that story when I was in high school the day I decided to skip school for the first time. I went to that exact same spot to hang out. My father found me two hours later, and boy was I in trouble!

Another story that I heard was about my Uncle Gerald. I didn't remember him, and I finally found out why no one talked about him. I was told that Uncle Gerald used to ride the rail. Basically, he hopped freight trains to see the country. One Christmas he didn't show up for the party, and everyone wondered and worried about him. About two weeks after Christmas, my father got a call from Texas authorities that Uncle Gerald had been hit by a train and killed.

Around seven-thirty, everyone was generally pretty jolly. This was the time for the gift exchange. All the lights in the house were on, and the Christmas music would be playing on the stereo in the background. Total chaos ruled as names were called, and children ran presents to the family members. Everyone was loud as they began ripping open packages in sheer excitement. Christmas paper covered the floor in every room.

Everyone was oohing and aahing, and saying their thanks.

All the kids picked a spot to set up and play with their new toys. The adults always joined in. This was my Uncle Jack's favorite part of the evening. Even though he was an adult with children and a grandchild of his own, he was just a kid at heart. Every child, however, knew to stay away from him. He enjoyed playing with the toys so much that they would almost inevitably end up broken before the end of the night. That is what he was known for in our family.

My parents are both gone now, and family get-togethers are not nearly as large as they used to be. Now that I am older, I can appreciate some of the ridiculous things that happened in my childhood. It helped me to see that although home was not always peaches and cream, there were some great memories for me to carry and to share with my children. My children need to know that there is a time for adults to act foolishly. As I have shared in my Christmas story, my children should be proud to know that they come from a long line of fools.

SALLIE E. JOHNSON



The Genes Make You Do It

Scientists are trying to discover genes that affect particular personality traits. It might surprise them to detect that everyone has a perfection gene. I have suspected for some time that not only does one exist, but that one variant of the gene causes perfection in one area while another variant causes perfection in another area.

I have an aunt who has a perfectionist eating gene variant. A plate of food is consumed in a clockwise rotation, and there must be an equal amount of each item, so the last trip around the plate will finish everything. One day in a restaurant, my aunt patiently explained to the confused waiter that she needed one more Brussels sprout. When he generously brought two, my son—who places Brussels sprouts just above poisoned mushrooms—quickly volunteered to eat the offending extra one before my aunt could order another forkful of all the other items to balance her plate.

I read in the newspaper about a woman with two thousand pairs of shoes, and I knew she must have the perfectionist shoe gene variant. One pair each of black, brown, beige and white shoes might suffice for others, but a person with this gene variant would crave shoes in all colors with low heels to high heels in graduated inches, strapped heels, closed heels, open toes, and closed toes. They would desire walking shoes, hiking shoes, running shoes, and jogging shoes. A person with the perfectionist shoe gene variant can not make-do; they require the perfect pair of shoes for every possible occasion even if they never participate.

On the opposite end of the perfection gene has to be the lipstick variant. Not for them just a red, a mauve, and a coral shades of lipstick, the possessors of this variant need to have the perfect shade for every outfit. The lipstick variant must be very prevalent. Why else would the cosmetic companies come out with dozens of new shades every season. A friend of mine surely has this gene variant. She carries seventeen tubes of

lipstick with her at all times which is quite a challenge with these fashionable small purses.

Discovering the perfection gene and identifying all of its variants will take genetic counseling to new heights. Before marriage, couples could discover hidden incompatibilities. No longer would a squeeze-the-tooth-paste-tube-in the-middle person accidentally marry a flat-toothpaste-tube-at-all-times perfectionist.

Surely with the publicity following the detection of the perfection gene and its variants, we will become more tolerant. The perfect bore and the perfect slob would be recognized as just the unfortunate owners of unfavorable variants. Of course, people then could receive counseling and encouragement to overcome undesirable perfection traits.

I am a recovering perfectionist; my gene variant is organization. I don't admit that to just anyone. There is seldom a sympathetic smile or encouraging nod yet. There is no support group, no buddy system. One can not call up another recovering perfectionist when temptation rears its ugly head, and relapses are a constant danger.

Only this morning, my husband showed me a loose thread in his favorite tie as he told me he had invited his boss for dinner. While I hurried to get a needle and matching thread, nostalgic memories of my last dinner party filled me with longing. My kitchen is never full of guests chopping and slicing; rather, each course follows the previous course with the precision of an atomic clock. What a binge of organization! Recovering myself, I quickly grabbed the stapler, repaired my husband's tie, told him if I was late to call in a pizza order, and left for my dulcimer lesson.

CASSANDRA HINE



Hair

I suppose I might say I have spent most of my life fighting my hair. Perhaps, however, a more accurate description might be to say that I have been in constant dialogue with it, always trying to wheedle and coax it to conform to my wishes. While usually now a source of compliments, it has at times been one of aggravation and even shame.

“Frizzy redhead!”

“Hey, Poodle!”

“Redhead woodpecker!”

“Did you stick your finger in a light socket?”

These were merely a sample of the array of flattering remarks I used to hear in reference to my hair.

Sometimes now when friends comment on my “gorgeous” hair or a man reflects upon his lifelong affinity for redheads, I want to scream, “Where the hell were you fifteen years ago when I needed you?!?”

Is it any wonder that my hair and I continue to engage in this sordid love-hate relationship?

My identity has seemingly always been inextricably intertwined in this nest of auburn. I was just a toddler when my head first reared its ugly hair. “Angel Pie with Fluffy Icing” was my nickname, endearingly bestowed by an ecstatic grandmother, and it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to deduce that the “fluffy icing” was indeed my hair. Preschool rivals and playmates alike, much to my childish chagrin, teasingly referred to me as “Shirley Temple.” I now grudgingly admit that both descriptions fit my childhood halo of downy curls.

Yes, I was my grandma’s living Kewpie doll, with my hair occupying a central role in her fun. Her love knew no bounds and manifested itself in her hair games. She subscribed to the theory that regular trims would “thicken up” my hair. I’m not sure if her hypothesis was ever scientifically proven, but within only a few years she did single-handedly transform my

sparse, Kewpie springs to something more closely resembling the impenetrable tuft of a Troll doll. And so, many were the nights Mom would arrive home from work to a freshly shorn and de-banged child, compliments of Gram, the hair guru.

In later years, one of Gram's other pastimes would consist of wrapping long strips of rags in my hair overnight to create dramatic bronze banana curls. Although the sausage-like curls usually made my scalp feel like a rack at the deli counter, the knowledge that these curls were the same kind worn by Gram as a Depression-era child struck a chord in my already-sentimental nine-year-old heart.

Banana curls aside, any blissful hair naiveté was soon torn from me like my ringlets in the hands of a bratty boy. The cold reality of life with natural curl during the Marcia Brady decade pervaded my world. The early 1970's were a time of silky waist-length tresses, a central part dividing equal hemispheres of shiny smoothness. For me, it was a perpetually unattainable state of existence.

"Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!" Jan cried, echoing my own frustration as she swung her golden locks and fled the Brady living room.

Times were definitely tough for us little red-haired girls, despite Charlie Brown's undying affection. The rising popularity of ice skater Dorothy Hamill around 1976 further hindered my quest for hair conformity. While my third grade friends sported the trademark wedge, I was left with my mother's halfhearted attempts to tame the fuzz from my follicles.

The approach and descent of adolescence only served to worsen my plight as the proportions of my mane expanded exponentially. My hair took on a life of its own. When my art teacher attempted to sketch my silhouette in sixth grade, the paper provided was too small to contain the shadow cast by my curls. Even now in adulthood I visibly wince when confronted with my seventh grade photo — the silky beige disco shirt and sienna faux-suede vest highlighted the rusty mass that cascaded down my shoulders. The camera lens overflowed with my hair. My grin was clueless.

You might also guess that my most vivid memory of that year's family vacation might be of carefree California beach frolicking, of adventurous Missouri spelunking, or perhaps witnessing a herd of elk cantering across an Idaho hillside. No, instead I recall (now laughingly) the more awesome

adventure of trying to restrain a geyser of hair that burst forth with the tenacity of Old Faithful. A trip photo epitomized the entire two-week ordeal — my sister and I stood at the St. Louis Arch on a blustery day, my entire face obscured by wind-whipped hair. At one point, I sobbingly bent over a sink in a South Dakota truck stop in a pathetic attempt to wash my nest. The faucet regurgitated a rusty trickle of colloidal, sulfur-scented “water.” A comb made of scotch-taped toothpicks had a better chance of penetrating my hirsute fortress than that water could’ve ever hoped for. Needless to say, my hair went unwashed until Iowa.

By the time I bid farewell to the teenage years, I had learned to tame my follicular beast. To echo the sentiments of countless Afro Sheen commercials, styling products were a Godsend! Mousses, gels, and other assorted hazardous chemicals transformed my hair from a fried, dried liability into an actual asset. Unbelievably, my first husband claimed my curls possessed a pheromone-like quality, drawing him to me like some crazed Japanese beetle to a tea rose. In retrospect, however, a can of Raid would have worked more in my favor.

My self-image required some adjustments when the hair gods finally smiled upon me. My former self-deprecation now seemed out of place. But did any hair vanity creep into my attitude? No... too fresh was the sting from my “bad hair life” for me to scorn anyone else.

I am currently near the end of yet another transitional hair phase. After my first marriage ended I was eager to shed traces of my ex-husband and of the relationship like black dog fur from white polyester knit. A trip to the stylist was in order! In minutes my once-shoulder-length hair grazed the tops of my ears. Ah, the freedom! The liberation! Oh, joy and rapture! The loss of several pounds of hair heightened my feeling of freedom from the unhappy relationship.

Subsequently, I evolved into a short hair junkie, cropped to greater extremes with each trip to the salon. Eventually I resembled a pixie with wisps the shade of cranberry sauce. I enjoyed the liberation of the “shower and go” lifestyle taken for granted by men everywhere. I gleefully drop-kicked the blow dryer and waved adios to scores of styling products. Lesbians hit on me. But, as enjoyable as all this was, resembling a prepubescent boy from the shoulders up soon grew tiresome. At my new fiancé’s urging I soon reclaimed my more feminine “do” of cascading ringlets.

Maybe he was afraid I might leave him for a woman if all this continued!

At different times of my life, my feelings about my hair have run the gamut from abhorrence to affection. Reactions from others (significant and otherwise) have made me want to retire to Unabomber-like seclusion, but they've also made me feel like one foxy chick. The teasing I underwent during my formative years definitely developed in me a sense of compassion for the coiffure-challenged and for the ridiculed in general. And while I am momentarily satisfied with my russet mop, I will never quite escape the echoes of past bad hair days. All it takes is one humid or windy day to magically, tragically transport me back to the bowels of an eighth-grade math class, where I tried to disappear in my seat to the strains of adolescent chants...

"Lassie, Lassie..."

Whew! Time to wipe the cold sweat from my forehead!



Nancy Howell

Research Essays

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Crime and Punishment

"Juvenile criminals are the most vile human beings on the face of the continent. . . they are truly vicious predators. They should be thrown in jail, the key should be thrown away, and there should be very little or no effort to rehabilitate them." Congressman Bill McCollum (R-FLA)

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." Jesus Christ (Mark 10:14-15)

What is the fastest growing service industry in America? Telecommunication, education, and computer technology all offer significant growth potential, but there is probably no sector of this economy so abloom with money and expeditious growth as the prison industry. In the past ten years (1987-1997), the number of adults incarcerated in the United States has grown 216 percent from what it was in 1987, from 888K to 1,915K ("Correctional Populations" 5). During the same period, the per capita crime rate has decreased 13 percent, from 5207 to 4556 crimes per 100,000 people, ("Correctional Populations" 23). This paradox underlies a dramatic change in social consciousness. During the "We Generation" of the late 60s and early 70s, at the height of the anti-war movement, the public was pursuing alternative methods to rehabilitate and deal with the anti-social behavior of criminals. In the "Me Generation" of today, society is looking for a way to dispossess its criminals. Over the past twenty-five years, the pendulum has swung from one sociological theory to the opposite and, with it, the most dramatic growth in prison population in a modern democracy. However, can we, as congressman McCollum proposed in his "Get Tough On Juveniles" legislation, throw away the key? What is the true meaning and cost to the legislative agenda which had led to this explosion in prison population? In evaluating and extrapolating the population growth, crime rate, and cost incumbent on this course of action, maybe we

can bring reason and sanity to a subject victimized by anger, frustration, and fear.

There is a stark lack of understanding on the part of the public regarding the growth in prison populations. Although the statistics have been fairly and frequently published, the public perceives the growth as little more than a reflection of overall population changes. In truth, the U.S. adult population has increased only 19 percent, from 1980 to 1995, from 163.5 million to 194 million (Pens, December 1997, 3), while the U.S. adult prison population has increased 237 percent during the same period from 319,598 to 1,078,545 (Pens, December 1997, 11). As pronounced as these statistics are, they do not reflect the whole change. Jail and private prison populations have grown even faster: 221 percent in twelve years for county and city jails ("Prison and Jail Inmates" 4) and 3200 percent for private prisons in ten years (Hartnett 29). Moreover, the preponderance of this growth has occurred in the last ten years, and the current growth rate exceeds the average for the last ten years. Probably the most telling statistic regarding the growth in prison population is the per capita rate. The number of adult prisoners per 100,000 U.S. citizens has increased 198 percent in the last twelve years, from 326 in 1985 to 645 in 1997 ("Correctional Populations" 24).

Even the most terse review of current and pending legislation demonstrates that this growth will continue. Federal, state, and local governments are uniformly increasing and toughening their sentencing laws. Notwithstanding a continued decrease in the national crime rate, the most conservative estimates place the adult prison population at around three and one half million by the year 2006.¹ At this level, the prison population will exceed one percent of the U.S. population; however, if indeed these prisoners are a violent threat to the public safety, is it not necessary to imprison them for the public good?

Is our current vendetta against the criminal elements of society filling the prisons with dangerous violent criminals? More likely, society's course of action is creating violent dangerous ex-felons. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) "Prisons in 1996" report on the percentage of change in various crimes tells a surprisingly different story regarding the changing growing prison population. In the ten years analyzed (1984 to 1995), violent offenses increased 86 percent, crimes against property increased 69

percent, and, most strikingly, drug related crimes increased 478 percent (“Correctional Populations” 16). Furthermore, violent crimes actually diminished for seven straight years starting in 1991 and had a one year decline of 7 percent in 1996 (Pens, October 1997, 3). Violent crime has declined 43 percent since 1991 in accordance with press releases by the United States Justice Department. This decline was not considered in the Bureau of Justice Statistics analysis.

The Government Accounting Office (GAO), in their testimony to congress regarding the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), sighted longer sentences as the key factor in the growth of prison populations. The largest growth among prisoners were those over the age of 55, with 43 percent from 1990 to 1993 (GAO 4). A revealing statistic when analyzing the growth in prison populations came out of the Bureau of Justice Statistics “Comparing Federal and State Prison Inmates, 1991” report. According to their study, the largest single felony for offenders 35 years of age or older was driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). Although clearly an anti-social behavior, DUI was not truly criminalized until the 1980s.

Is prison the best solution for old drunks and young drug addicts? Not according to a study by the Rand Corporation, a Washington D.C. think tank. The results released in May of 1997 concluded that drug treatment is seven times more cost-effective than incarceration (Pens, October 1997, 3). To paraphrase the report: one dollar spent on treatment is more effective than seven dollars spent putting a drug user in prison. Drug addicts and alcoholics become a major component of the prison populations, which reflects changing social attitudes and corresponding legislation. This transformation can be traced back to two national media campaigns commencing almost simultaneously in the 1980s. The Reagan Administration’s “War on Drugs” created a national awareness of the problem of drug abuse. This resulted in an implementation of repressive and reactionary laws. Mother’s Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was a grass roots crusade which garnered national attention on the problem of drunk drivers and had similar legal consequences. The fundamental fact is that we have taken social problems and made them into criminal problems. Criminalizing society’s problems has a cost.

As prison populations grow, regardless of the reasons, there will be a geometric increase in cost. These costs are hard to delineate and compare

in that each state and federal government accounts for prison costs differently. For example, Indiana claims to spend "\$16,680.50 per year to keep an adult inmate incarcerated" (FAQS). This cost is over seven thousand dollars below the national average; but Indiana lies. They include in their prison population former felons released on parole. Parolees are required to make monthly payments to the Indiana Department of Correction (DOC) to compensate for their cost of supervision. If we recompute DOC's operating budget to reflect only the incarcerated, Indiana spends \$21,568 per year (FAQS). This is still a couple thousand dollars less than the current national average (National Criminal Justice 2). The GAO in its 1995 report to congress stated that operating costs for state and federal prisons, combined, grew from \$3 billion in fiscal year 1980 to about \$17.7 billion in fiscal year 1994. The corresponding growth rate in terms of inflation-adjusted dollars was 9.1 percent annually (GAO 2). Both Indiana's and the GAO's financial figures represent only the operating budget. The cost of physical plant and capital equipment could easily add another 30 percent a year to the respective budgets. Extrapolating only the operating budget, a conservative estimate of \$130 billion is projected for the year 2006.² Figuratively speaking, a new Toyota Camry will be stolen from every family in America to pay for the operation of prisons in 2006 (about \$140 a month for a family of four). As insane as these costs appear, they are only part of the price of the growing prison population. There is a social cost incumbent in all these prisons and prisoners to consider. This price is of the most grave consideration: the culture of punishment and status degradation will eventually spill over onto the rest of society. In the design and implementation of punishment policies, we must be vigilant because whenever we deliberately inflict pain and punishment, we deform and diminish ourselves as a society.

The simple questions are: is our culture predestined to dissipate its wealth, its humanity, and its disenfranchised citizens through the psychotic infatuation with punishment, or can we deal with our fear, frustration, and anger in a more constructive manner? Is prison the only and best alternative to society's problems, or can we find other choices less costly both financially and socially? Answering these questions may very well be the most important undertaking of our society in the next ten years.

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1. Author used the statistical averages developed by the BJS and Bureau of Census. In all cases the author utilized the lowest statistic in each category. In cases where the only accurate statistics were for periods of the last ten years (1987 to 1997) the author reduced the statistics by 10 percent, except for the growth in private prisons, where the author reduced the growth rate by 33 percent a year until it was equal to or less than all other growth rates. This was done to ensure that the projected growth rates was not biased by the dramatic growth of the last ten years. Additional reference material: *United States Statistical Abstract: The National Data Book Bureau of Census*. Washington: GPO, May 1998.

2. Author reduced historical cost increases by 33 percent (See GAO Figures), then utilized the Indiana actual average cost at \$21,568 which is less than the national average as the base cost of incarceration. The author further used population growth projections by the Bureau of Census and the previous populations growth in prisons (see above Endnote).

KRISTI KAY BROSMER



The Good, the Bad, and the Transcendent: The Role of Women in the Old Testament

The women found in the Old Testament of The Bible are typologies of the duality in which women are held. The “fallen” women and the “virtuous” women illustrate this duality; however, they also demonstrate that women can transcend these traditional boundaries. The Old Testament also allows a view of the way in which Hebrew and other ancient cultures treated and perceived women.

The virtuous women found in the Old Testament illustrate the Hebrew conception of the “good” woman. All of these women can be categorized as being good wives, good mothers, and/or good Hebrews. Most are submissive and are controlled by the patriarchal power structure. They symbolize what women ought to be according to Hebrew tradition. The Old Testament describes several virtuous women; three of the most famous are Ruth, Hannah, and Rachel.

Ruth is one of the most virtuous women in The Bible, bowing to both men and women in order to achieve salvation: “Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger” (Ruth 2:10). “Modest, meek, courteous, loyal, responsible, gentle yet decisive, Ruth always seems to do the right thing at the right time,” states Edith Deen in *All of the Women of the Bible* (82). All of the above words conjure an image of the dutiful woman and Ruth fits the mold of that woman perfectly. Ruth, showing extreme devotion, follows her mother-in-law, Naomi: “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God” (Ruth 1:16). A foreign woman, she marries a Hebrew man and becomes a devout Hebrew setting a powerful example of the good Hebrew woman. Her character illustrates that women who obey God are

meek, unselfish, and devoted to their Hebrew family. Furthermore, Ruth also establishes the fact that women can survive together. Renita Weems writes in *Just a Sister Away*, "Ruth and Naomi's story is especially refreshing because it is a story of friendship between a woman and her grieving mother-in-law. Their friendship is a welcome contrast to the numerous other stories in The Bible which portray women competing against one another for status, power, and men" (24). While she does not compete for a man, she is still a woman who needs someone to be dependent upon, whether it is God, man, or another woman. Because of this dependency she is rarely shown as strong. Therefore, she becomes a silent, dutiful woman who is later rewarded by being married to a prosperous man. This demonstrates the need for a patriarchal culture to assume that a woman needs a male figure in order to direct her life. Ruth symbolizes a woman who lacks her own autonomy and free will.

Hannah represents another virtue that the Hebrews held dear for women: motherhood. Hannah is a barren woman, who after praying to God, gives birth to Samuel: "And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her" (1 Samuel 1:19). Hannah is not detailed extensively within The Bible, and she is remembered, most importantly, for the feats of her son, not those of her own. However, the role of Hannah in the Old Testament is of extreme importance to the Hebrew culture. It was expected that women would raise their children, so that the moral character of the son is a direct indication of the moral character of the mother. Hannah also plays an important role by allowing her son to serve God. In *Great People of The Bible and How They Lived*, G. Wright states, "Eventually, Hannah bore a son...As soon as the child was weaned she fulfilled her vow by delivering him to the shrine at Shiloh where he was placed in the care of the high priest Eli, for training as a Nazirite" (136). Therefore, Hannah, like Ruth, is still dependent upon a male to prove her own worth to society.

"Leban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender eyed, but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter" (Gen. 30:16-18). Rachel is a beautiful maiden who captures the love of Jacob after he has been

wandering for 500 miles in order to reach his uncle Leban's house. However, in order to marry Rachel, he must first marry Leah. The story unfolds with the fact that Rachel is barren, while Leah is able to bear many children. In Rachel's effort to be a good wife she prays for children but ironically dies in childbirth. The tale of Rachel shows the important virtue of being a good wife. She was beautiful, young, and soft-spoken. But this story also gives an example of the polygamist marriages of the time and the possible problems they might pose for women. Rachel is heart-broken and jealous of her older sister while Leah feels unloved by Jacob and is jealous of the love between Jacob and Rachel. There is some evidence from the text that shows his appreciation for both of his wives' knowledge. After having his wages changed by the women's father, Jacob speaks to Leah and Rachel. Deen states, "When Jacob did not make the decision alone, but consulted his wives, he demonstrated that he, like other patriarchs, took no major steps without counseling with his wives. And Rachel and Leah regarded themselves as their husbands equal" (33). Unfortunately, it is because of their intimate knowledge of their father that leads Jacob into speaking with his wives, not an attempt to equalize the domestic situation. The illustration of this particular marriage, and other marriages of the time, does not lend credence to support Deen's claim. Neither woman was given a choice in her marriage, and it is not difficult to imagine how they could, in the situation, find themselves equal to their husband. Even a monogamous marriage did not allow women the ability to marry whom they chose. The decision remained patriarchal; but, according to the Old Testament, Rachel never falters in her attempt to be a dutiful wife, and, therefore, lives up to her biblical expectation of "standing by her man."

These women share virtues of being good mothers, wives, and Hebrews, and, therefore, these attributes and characteristics seem to indirectly impact on the greatness of the men in their lives or in helping to maintain the influence of God. Their roles then secure an example of what women should become in life. Therefore, these examples fit the conception that the system established and imposed on women.

In direct contrast to the virtuous women, the fallen women are what men feared most in society. Many women in The Bible are labeled as "fallen." The crime that most of these women seem to have committed is not obeying or living by the rules assigned to them by the Hebrew God or

the Hebrew man. Three of the most infamous fallen women are Eve, Jezebel, and Delilah.

“And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man made he woman, and brought her unto the man” (Gen. 2: 22). The most famous woman in The Bible, Eve, has come to exemplify the destruction caused by women. “Whatever the Life-Goddess Eve was originally like, she appears in Genesis as a Hebrew Pandora, the vileness in a story about the origin of human misfortune...She has dwindled to being merely the first woman, a troublemaker, created from a rib of the senior and dominant first man,” states Geoffrey Ashe in *The Virgin* (16-17). Eve’s name is now a symbol of how temptation by a woman can lead to the fall of man. She listens to the serpent who tells her to eat from the forbidden tree: “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3: 4,5). The fall of this particular woman is of dual importance. First, she disobeys God by listening to the serpent and eating from the tree of knowledge. This is not only presented as a way of disobeying God, but also as a way of becoming as powerful as God. Second, she not only picks the fruit from the tree for herself, but she also corrupts man when she encourages Adam to eat from the tree. While all parties involved are punished for their violation of God’s word, Eve is seemingly meant to be punished most harshly: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3: 16). Woman, in this case, Eve, is seen as the individual to blame.

Perhaps Eve is the most important fallen woman because her behavior gives patriarchal culture an excuse for women to be situated on an unequal level with men. John Phillips comments in *Eve*,

The story of Eve is, in a sense, at the heart of the concept of Woman in Western civilization. In the Genesis story, she is the most important character in the drama enacted in the Garden of Eden. Her actions precipitate the fall from unity and harmony with God into estrangement and sin; into the human condition of sexual consciousness and conscience, as well as the hard realities of birth,

work, and death. She is also Everywoman, the prototypical woman; all of her sex who are yet to come. And, as Everywoman, her actions in Genesis cause her to be regarded in Western religions as a special problem, requiring special measures for the working out of her salvation (xiii).

Therefore the tale of Eve establishes, in the mind of some, an excuse for woman to be below man. She is to blame for Original Sin, and she is the first woman who falls in the eyes of God and man. It is her tale that makes man afraid of what seduction can do. She is a precursor for all the fallen women to follow, and Adam represents the first of all men who would be tricked by a woman.

If Eve's name has become symbolic for the tragedy that befell humanity, then Jezebel's has become symbolic for a very different kind of fall. Jezebel's name has become a word to describe a shameless, wicked, and whorish woman. She is described as being simply evil when her name is mentioned in The Bible: "For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord" (1 Kings 8: 4). Jezebel was a Phoenician princess who married King Ahab of Israel. Jezebel's crime was establishing the cult of Baal in her husband's kingdom, exterminating the prophets, and controlling her husband in many affairs of the state. In essence, she was a vocal outsider who follows her own religious path; however, she attempts to convert people to her religion which is directly against the wishes of the Hebrews. Popular culture supports the idea that she condemned herself when she rejected Christianity. Deen states, "When she tried to impose the materialistic and sensuous cult of her native Tyre upon Israel, she denied the ultimate value of spiritual victory and became the enemy of one God, a God of purity, righteousness, law, and order" (126). The man who she was unable to conquer was the prophet Elijah, who eventually helped seal her fate. Elijah's stance was that it was the will of God to kill Jezebel: "This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel" (2 Kings 9: 36, 37). In her attempt to continue worshipping her own faith and assisting her husband, she becomes a symbol for what a woman ought not to become.

She not only believes in another God, but she also becomes a dominant figure at a time when women are not supposed to be dominant. Making her last exit, she even tempts God to kill her: "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window" (2 Kings 9: 30). She illustrates how a patriarchal society destroys the women who deviate from their definition of correct feminine behavior.

Like Eve, Delilah is a symbol of seduction. Delilah, a Philistine, is sent to seduce the great and powerful Samson: "And the lords of the Philistines came unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him, and we will give thee every one of us 11 hundred pieces of silver" (Judges 6: 15). Of course, Samson falls in love with the sensual Delilah. "And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee" (Judges 16: 6). Samson lies to Delilah again and again, seeing that she is attempting to destroy him, but on her fourth attempt he tells her where his strength lies. "And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth. And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (Judges 16: 15-17). It is through Samson's stupidity and low moral character which leads Delilah into discovering the important information for his ruin. So why is Delilah considered a fallen woman to those in The Bible and society? She has fallen because, like others before her, she, as a woman, uses sex as a way to gain information from a God-fearing man. She was on the losing side, as far as it was considered in The Bible, so instead of a heroine saving her own people, she becomes a seducer and spy for the Philistines against the Hebrews.

These fallen women in the Old Testament show how women should not act. They are the direct opposite of what women under patriarchal rule should be, and all remain outsiders. Thus, they are all shown as evil. Through sex and love, they become manipulative and cruel. None of these

women are traditionally viewed as strong and independent women, but fall in society's eyes as women who lack morality.

Looking at the roles of the females in the Old Testament, one must also look at the roles of their male counterparts. The females in the text are usually situated into dual categories; however, men are given more diverse roles. Instead of being situated as good and bad, men fall into many different shades of gray. Comparing Adam to Eve, it is easy to see that Adam maintains a role that is not seen as good or evil, but rather somewhere in the middle. The same is true with Samson. Delilah is seen as an instigator who tempts Samson, and is, therefore, designated as evil.

Whereas, Samson, through his own ignorance and low moral character, defeats himself, he is not held accountable and even prospers in the end.

The Bible serves the purpose that most religious texts set out to fulfill. It codifies and teaches its interpretation of correct moral behavior. It also situates people in its definition of the correct and incorrect role; therefore, women are seen as being either good or bad, black or white; however, there are some women who transcend these boundaries. The Bible offers very few examples of this, but two can be found in the Old Testament. These women are Deborah and Esther, both queens who lead their people to safety through different methods.

Deborah transcends the normal boundaries set for women at the time. She becomes a political power symbol, a warrior, and a champion of her people: "I will surely go with thee; not withstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord's shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judges 4:9). Deen writes, "Because the men of Israel had faltered in leadership, Deborah arose to denounce this lack of leadership and to affirm that deliverance from oppression was at hand. Her religious zeal and patriotic fervor armed her with new strength. She became the magnificent personification of the free spirit of the people of Israel" (70). She remains one of the very few women in The Bible who is able to gain power through her own intellect and leadership. She is seen and described as noble, not as a sex object or seductress. Her strength comes from within herself, not the result of marrying well or giving birth to a good son. She is still a devoted Hebrew while remaining strong, independent, and vocal. She, then, is situated in a very unique position.

"Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had

charged her that she should not shew it" (Esther 2:10). Esther, perhaps one of the most controversial women in The Bible, can be viewed in many different ways. She is both a sex object and a powerful queen. In fact, she gains her position because of her beauty, not her skill. However, she is of extreme importance to the Jewish people. It is she who is able to save them. She is the second wife of King Ahasuerus of Persia, and, through her political role as queen, she ensures that the Jews will not be slain by her husband. Weems comments, "Like Queen Vashti, the circumference of the power of these women has often been confined to issues that concern women. But many times in the past it is precisely because of their relationships and access to certain kinds of information that these women have been able to monitor and act as advocates for policies and issues that immediately impact women" (105). She saves her people, not through virtue, nor through direct evil. "But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows" (Esther 10: 25). Esther chooses her people, rather than her husband, thus becoming different from most of the other women. She thereby transcends the stipulated boundaries.

Women play an important role in the Old Testament. They represent the good, the bad, and the transcendent through their actions and perceived behavior. However, all of these women are controlled by a patriarchal system that writes their lives for the world to see. Their traits are assigned and defined by a male culture from which they are, ultimately, unable to escape.

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CASSANDRA HINE



Vincent van Gogh

"Starry, starry night
Paint your palette blue and gray
Look out on a summer's day
with eyes that know the darkness in my soul. . . "

". . . Now I understand
What you tried to say to me
and how you suffered for your sanity
And how you tried to set them free
They did not listen, they did not know how
Perhaps they'll listen now. . . "

These haunting lyrics, crooned by Don Mclean in the song, "Vincent," provide a fitting eulogy for the complex persona of Vincent van Gogh. Blessed with artistic genius, yet plagued by mental illness and society's subsequent ostracism, van Gogh has been psychoanalyzed at great length, informs J. H. Plokker, author of *Art From the Mentally Disturbed: The Shattered Vision of Schizophrenics* (116). As the stereotypical "eccentric artist," van Gogh displayed numerous quirks and oddities throughout his life that culminated in his premature, self-inflicted death at age thirty-seven. However, as pointed out by Marc Edo Tralbaut, author of *Vincent van Gogh, analysts*, despite much discussion and theorizing, remain puzzled regarding a definitive diagnosis for van Gogh's malady (9):

It is as if there are two persons inside him, one marvelously gifted, fine, and gentle, the other self-loving and callous. . . They present themselves in turns, so that one hears him talk first one way, then in the other, and always an argument on both sides. (Theo van Gogh, quoted in Plokker 114 and Tralbaut 214).

Numerous hypotheses regarding van Gogh's insanity have been introduced by mental health professionals. This debate has primarily focused on a diagnosis of schizophrenia, as discussed by Plokker (115). Plokker discloses that much of the psychiatric world is hesitant to label van Gogh as schizophrenic (112) due to his passionate, often flamboyant, personality. Schizophrenics often exhibit flat affect and/or some degree of catatonia. Based on this guideline, van Gogh's animated personality certainly exempts him from this diagnosis (114).

Other reasons for the absence of diagnostic consensus exist. Plokker informs us that the psychoanalyst G. Kraus feels van Gogh was an unlikely schizophrenic based on his "continued exceptional sensitivity to his surroundings." Kraus's findings result from van Gogh's apparent lack of ongoing dementia and from his continued insight into his own illness. Plokker adds that van Gogh's mind was lucid at the time of his suicide, and Ronald Pickvance writes in *Van Gogh in Arles* that throughout his life van Gogh was painfully aware of his own nervous problems. This awareness, as well as van Gogh's conscious references to his own melancholy (25), contradicts a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Proponents of schizophrenia as a diagnosis for van Gogh, however, present a strong argument encouraging many other experts to maintain that he did, indeed, suffer from this condition. Plokker discusses K. Jaspers' posthumous psychoanalysis of van Gogh from which Jaspers deduced that van Gogh was schizophrenic (111). Jaspers pinpointed 1887 as the onset of van Gogh's illness (62). Interestingly, in support of Jasper's conclusions, van Gogh himself referred to a "breakdown" and a "stroke" occurring in Paris around that time (Pickvance 25).

Further evidence suggests van Gogh suffered from schizophrenia. Plokker pontificates on the attempts to label van Gogh as schizophrenic based on an observed decline in the quality of his work near the end of his life (115). This erosion of quality correlates to a schizophrenic behavior in which the victim may at some point either raise himself above or fall below his normal existence patterns (62). This idea, that van Gogh fell below his normal artistic performance level near the end of his life, was formulated by psychoanalyst Westerman Holstijn, who observed what he felt to be a deterioration in the quality of van Gogh's work after 1890. Holstijn felt this decline was a direct result of van Gogh's schizophrenic tendencies

(116). Concurrently, Jaspers also referred to the time after 1890 as one of “mental impoverishment and uncertainty” for van Gogh, and he felt that the crisis was reflected in van Gogh’s art from that period (112).

Plokker continues to cite support for schizophrenia as van Gogh’s ailment. Plokker recounts the research of another psychoanalyst, O.H. Arnold, who observed a shedding of old habits in schizophrenics as completely new regimens emerge. Directly correlating to this phenomenon, van Gogh’s art underwent a major transformation of light and color after he departed Paris for southern France (112).

Van Gogh exhibited other tendencies that are classically schizophrenic (Plokker 62). Pickvance recounts that the doctor who treated van Gogh during his second psychiatric hospitalization reported that van Gogh claimed to hear voices. This physician, Dr. Albert Delon, also recorded that van Gogh thought he was being poisoned (240). Sander L. Gilman writes in *Seeing the Insane* that prior to his 1889 hospitalization, van Gogh suffered delusions of persecution (218), and in a letter from that same year he described his “unbearable hallucinations” (Pickvance 29). Such delusions are considered hallmark symptoms of schizophrenia.

Another schizophrenic symptom exhibited by van Gogh is the inability of victims to feel intimately connected to their surroundings. Thus, schizophrenics have no sense of belonging, nor have they a psychic home (Plokker 62). Constance Bond tells us, in “Van Gogh’s Van Goghs,” that van Gogh demonstrated this tendency by moving often, living in Paris, London, Brussels, and numerous obscure Dutch and Belgian towns (1). Additionally, schizophrenics retreat from their destined fates (Plokker 62) and have difficulty accepting their lots in life. Bond’s discussion of van Gogh’s multiple occupations corresponds with this concept. Before pursuing an art career, van Gogh labored as an art dealer, school teacher, lay-clergyman, and a bookstore clerk (1). He never felt emotionally or spiritually settled in any of these fields.

Genetic factors also allude to a possible diagnosis of schizophrenia. It is not uncommon to find schizophrenia present among siblings or other family members, says Porter-Starke mental health outreach coordinator, Kenneth Hine, during a recent interview. Not surprisingly, Plokker mentions that van Gogh’s youngest sister suffered from schizophrenia and was institutionalized for thirty-eight years (116).

Those analysts not convinced that van Gogh suffered from schizophrenia have introduced alternative theories. An illness related to the brain, yet entirely unrelated to schizophrenia, has been considered. Pickvance suggests van Gogh suffered from epilepsy (25). Kent van de Graaf and Ira Stewart Fox state in *Concept of Human Anatomy* that epilepsy is not an uncommon disease, does not affect intelligence, and, like schizophrenia, may also have a genetic link (397).

Similarities between epilepsy and schizophrenia sometimes create diagnostic difficulties. Van de Graaf and Fox reveal that epilepsy has been mistaken for mental illness. It is not difficult to see why van Gogh may indeed have been a misdiagnosed epileptic since both conditions may cause confusion and/or detachment from reality (397). Likewise, Pickvance indicates that van Gogh reported experiencing at least three separate episodes of psychotic amnesia (30). After his attacks, van Gogh also admitted to having substantial "inner seizures" (256) and knew of at least three "fainting fits" he had suffered. Furthermore, characteristics of epilepsy may be observed in people who are not classically epileptic (30), so it is possible he may have merely exhibited symptoms instead of the full-blown disease.

There is one modern diagnosis that without question applies to Vincent van Gogh. Van Gogh definitely suffered from depression/anxiety disorder (Hine). Pickvance discusses the terrible episodes of anxiety suffered by van Gogh (30) and exacerbated by life in modern Europe (256). Even when not anxious, van Gogh felt empty or sometimes "fatigue[d] in the head" (30). Recurrent feelings of emptiness and mental fatigue are classic symptoms of depression/anxiety disorder (Hine).

Van Gogh also exhibited other symptoms of depression/anxiety disorder. One of these symptoms consists of the victim blaming himself for the illness (Hine). This was an activity that van Gogh actively partook (Pickvance 30). Another symptom of depression/anxiety disorder is a sense of alienation from the rest of society (Hine). Pickvance writes how van Gogh felt increasingly alienated and distant from the townspeople of Arles (45). Van Gogh felt removed from his surroundings (19), lonely, friendless, and depressed in Arles (71). Yet another symptom of depression/anxiety disorder is the recurrent feeling of vague remorse (Hine) that Pickvance says plagued van Gogh (30). Not applying a diagnosis of

depression/anxiety disorder to van Gogh would constitute overlooking the obvious.

“I have been ‘in a hole’ all my life, and my mental condition is not only vague now, but has always been so, so that whatever is done for me, I cannot think things out so as to balance my life.” (Vincent van Gogh, quoted in Pickvance 30).

How did van Gogh view his own mental condition? Despite his introspective nature, he himself did not fully comprehend that from which he suffered (Pickvance 30). Gilman informs us that van Gogh gained firsthand knowledge of the true, chaotic insanity that pervaded St.-Remy, an asylum where he recovered from a psychotic episode (Pickvance 241). Based on this knowledge and influenced by his profound fear of madness (Gilman 218), van Gogh concluded that he did not fit the strict definition of a madman. Part of this self-diagnosis arose from his own grasp of the high artistic quality and sense of calm exuded by his art (Pickvance 240). While his painting served to partially alleviate his fear of madness (Gilman 221), it never completely provided a full reprieve from his mental suffering (Pickvance 27).

Though he did not consider himself technically “mad,” van Gogh was acutely aware that he could not be considered “normal,” either. Pickvance describes van Gogh in April 1889 as feeling well, yet still experiencing the presence of a “vague undercurrent of sadness difficult to define” (30). He complained of encountering horrific episodes of anguish (29), yet could find no real reason for his anxiety (30). He viewed the world as the Creator’s mistake, hurriedly and sloppily made (Wallace 8), yet, analogously, van Gogh himself felt he never accomplished long term goals in the manner in which he intended (Pickvance 102). Van Gogh admitted that he would rather fool himself than feel alone, yet he experienced bitterness over having to fool himself about everything in his life to avert depression (Pickvance 19).

Van Gogh was aware that he had difficulty containing his emotions. He admitted that sometimes his feelings were so powerful that he was not fully conscious of his actions (Pickvance 104). For example, van Gogh admired peasants and the physical tasks they undertook. This admiration

compelled him to yell to them from the side of a road, "How shall I ever manage to paint what I love so much?" (Wallace 30). He complained of feeling misunderstood (Roskill 133), but not many onlookers would be capable of comprehending such odd behavior.

"[I]nstead of eating enough and at regular times, I kept myself going on coffee and alcohol. [I] admit that, but all the same it is true that to attain the high yellow note I attained last summer, I had to be pretty well keyed up." (Vincent van Gogh, quoted in Pickvance 139).

Van Gogh's unstable mental state was exacerbated by his poor physical health. Van Gogh neglected himself physically even though, as Pickvance writes, he realized his mental health improved when he was physically well (28). Van Gogh once stated that his Parisian physician had referred to artists as a "sickly lot," causing van Gogh to view his own physical ailments as quite normal in comparison to those of his peers (24). Furthermore, his male family members often fell ill (Tralbaut 16). This common denominator, however, did not prevent van Gogh's haggard appearance from sometimes upsetting those close to him (Wallace 12).

In general, van Gogh had an incredibly unhealthy lifestyle. Pickvance presents a list of van Gogh's ailments that include circulatory and digestive problems and anemia (25). As an adult, he was chronically malnourished because he used his scarce resources to pay models, purchase art supplies, according to Robert Wallace, author of *The World of Vincent van Gogh, 1853 - 1890* (29). Pickvance tells us that at one point van Gogh was so destitute that he lived for four days on twenty-three cups of coffee (25). He assigned partial blame for his maladies, however, to the lack of quality restaurants from which to choose (21).

Van Gogh's itinerary of harmful health practices did not end there. Pickvance adds that van Gogh also smoked and drank excessively, yet any attempts to curb these activities induced bouts of melancholy (25). Additionally, he was once treated for gonorrhea (Wallace 34) and was thought to have contracted syphilis (Pickvance 25) during one of his many liaisons with prostitutes (Wallace 34). These extracurricular activities did not improve his mental state. It only exacerbated his bouts with dementia.

“I want you to understand clearly my conception of art. What I want and aim at is confoundedly difficult, and yet I do not think I aim too high. I want to do drawings which touch some people. . .I want to progress so far that people will say of my work, he feels deeply, he feels tenderly — not withstanding my so-called roughness, perhaps even because of it. . .What am I in most people’s eyes? A nonentity, an eccentric and disagreeable man — somebody who has no position in society and never will have, in short, the lowest of the low. Very well... then I want my work to show what is in the heart of such an eccentric.” (Vincent van Gogh, quoted in Wallace 33)

While usually viewed only in a negative light, in numerous ways van Gogh’s mental illness actually exerted positive effects on his art; however, Plokker reiterates the psychoanalytic wavering of mental health specialists regarding van Gogh’s condition. While hesitant to name van Gogh’s illness as the actual driving force of his artistic genius, psychoanalysts instead prefer to concentrate on the ways in which his madness influenced his art (116).

It is undeniable that van Gogh’s illness affected his artwork. In *Art and Psyche*, Ellen Handler Spitz surmises that although it appears difficult to determine how van Gogh was able to paint at all while ill, his work during episodes of madness is now considered his most brilliant (51). Interestingly, Plokker states that van Gogh’s illness was in no way detrimental to the value of his work, and, in fact, his artistic desire showed no signs of weakening after his breakdowns. On the contrary, the fact that the mentally ill often attach distinct meanings to colors and use surprising and vivid color combinations (166) proved his illness beneficial in the long run, as opposed to decreasing the value of his work (116).

Van Gogh’s illness helped to improve his art in other ways. Plokker refers to an experience of enlightenment often experienced by artistic mental patients that usually occurs near the onset of the illness. This heightened perception often manifests itself in a great work that ultimately may consume or destroy the artist (62). Van Gogh exhibited a tremendous burst of activity, creativity, and innovation during the early stages of his disease (14). During this time he painted what are considered his most

inspired works (Wallace 8). His illness did not cause his sense of design or touch to decline (Pickvance 246); on the contrary, these talents remained intact if not heightened (Pickvance 246). No wonder van Gogh felt his insanity was not a total tragedy if good art arose from it (Pickvance 29).

When examining the psychiatric afflictions of this unconventional genius, we must not overlook the profound effects mental illness exerted on van Gogh's lonely life; however, it is imperative that we not define his entire existence by his insanity. We must not view him solely as a pitiful, doomed soul, nor as a lunatic who needed protection from himself. Instead we need to consider the spirit within him — an overly-sensitive, romantic spirit unprepared to face an insensitive, unromantic world that was, likewise, not quite ready for him. Perhaps, as the layers of mystery surrounding his malady continue to unfold like the petals of his beloved sunflowers, we will find that part of modern society's fascination with Vincent van Gogh may be born of familiarity. As his sky-blue eyes stare back at us from his haunting self-portraits, many of us can see traces of our own reflection in his feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and ongoing battle for sanity in an insane world. Let us hope, however, that through society's increased compassion for and better understanding of mental illness, those unfortunate souls fighting demons similar to van Gogh's will not meet a similar tragic demise.

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BRENDA LIKAVEC



Dublin through the Eyes of Dubliners: The Inescapable City

The desire to connect with another human being may or may not be an innate concern of humankind but it is certainly a careful issue in James Joyce's *Dubliners*. The situations into which people are born may directly or indirectly effect the success of connections that they can make with others. One such factor may be birthplace, whether it is an oppressive community by law or by economic constraints. The stories contained within James Joyce's *Dubliners* are all centered in the city of Dublin, of which Joyce himself said, "that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis" (Kenner 48). The city itself in this work is the object that underlies all of the stories, much like the Gothic castle: no one can ever really escape the city, physically or mentally. The city, being the "centre of paralysis," imposes a stasis upon its citizens in *Dubliners* as it does to Stephen Daedalus in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Throughout all of these stories, the characters are not able to connect with anyone or anything. This inability to connect leads to isolation and even despair or anguish as the characters realize that they are alone. In "Araby," the young unnamed boy is unable to connect with the object of his desire, the older sister of his friend Mangan, leaving him disillusioned with Dublin and the world. In "Eveline," the title character cannot connect to the one man who can save her from her dreary existence in Dublin, leaving her jilted in her miserable life. In "Counterparts," Farrington is unable to form a connection at work or at home, leaving him a cruel, drunken man who persecutes his family. In "A Painful Case," Mr. Duffy's desire to be alone is interrupted surprisingly, but in his stubbornness, he refuses to allow a connection to occur between himself and Emily, upon whose death he feels alone again. Finally, in "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy, looking out upon the snow falling over all of Dublin, realizes that he is as alone as a bachelor, even though he is married. These five stories from *Dubliners* illustrate the unrealized desire

of the citizens of Dublin to connect with other people to form a meaningful relationship, and the denial of this union leads to lives paralyzed by loneliness and eventual despair.

In "Araby," the boy is alone in many ways, a situation enhanced by the geography within the story. It becomes apparent that the boy does not have parents who care for him; instead he lives with his uncle and aunt. The text does not implicitly state whether the boy is an orphan or whether unloving parents abandoned him. Either scenario leads him to his present state of a young boy without natural paternal or maternal support. A second major factor that leads to this boy's isolation is his circumstances: "North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street.... An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from the neighbors in a square ground" (Joyce 15). Behind the boy's house was a garden with a central apple tree, symbolic of the tree from the biblical Garden of Eden which led to humanity's downfall. Behind this garden lay an ashpit, a symbol of the wasteland of Hell. This physical description paints a portrait of a dreary street with only one way out. The actual house in which the young boy lives is also oppressive. The previous occupant of the house was a priest who actually died in the back drawing room of the house. "Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms" (Joyce 15). An oppressive air clearly pervaded the house, contributing to the boy's feeling of isolation. Further, the boy does not seem to have many close friends. A neighbor boy, Mangan, seems to be his closest acquaintance but, with the boy's infatuation with Mangan's older sister, this boyhood relationship is tenuous. The boy desperately wants to forge a romantic relationship with the older girl but is unsure exactly how to do so: "I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her my confused adoration" (Joyce 16). When the boy finally does speak to the girl, he believes that he may now have the opportunity to become more than just the friend of her younger brother. After he speaks to her of the magnificent bazaar, Araby, his thoughts are obsessed with what to buy the girl and what will be the results of his purchase: "The syllables of the word Araby were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me" (17). The boy painfully labored to be able to gain permission to attend this bazaar, while his mind and heart building to a fervor as the day drew nearer. He

suffers many disappointments on the day of Araby, including a very late start for the bazaar; he begins his journey toward disillusionment by encountering several more difficulties on the way. Once he reaches the fair, what is perhaps the ultimate disappointment occurs. The conversation that he overhears brings him to his epiphany, which means a “sudden revelation of the whatness of a thing, the moment in which ‘the soul of the commonest object...seems to us radiant’” (Valente 1). The boy overhears the following conversation at the bazaar:

“O, I never said such a thing!”

“O, but you did!”

“O, but I didn’t!”

“Didn’t she say that?”

“Yes. I heard her.”

“O, there’s a ...fib!” (Joyce 19).

At this point, the boy has his own epiphany: “He realizes the vacuity of the speakers as well as the aimlessness of his own expectations” (Valente 6). At this moment, ironically, in the darkness, he realizes that he is indeed alone and sees himself not as a person, but rather as “a creature driven and derided by vanity” (*Dubliners* 19). The boy abandons hope that he will be able to connect with the girl, and with his “eyes burned with anguish and anger” (19) he returns home to his lonely existence. Now he may in fact be more alone than previously, entrapped in his home, his city, and his mind, by the realization of his self-described foolishness.

In “Eveline,” the title character is a young woman in Dublin unable to escape her domineering and overbearing father. She has found an apparent escape from her world of loneliness and agony and plans to secretly run away from Dublin with a man named Frank. She seems at first to be connected to Frank; however, in actuality, she is “torn between Frank and her father, tugged by the injunction of her dead mother” (Kenner 54). Eveline becomes trapped by Dublin, which seems to be the driving force in this story. The thoughts that Dublin has allowed her to think, and “the materials it has given her mind to feed on” (55) keep her in the city. She never actually is able to make a decision of action; instead she chooses inaction and does absolutely nothing to help herself. The act of going toward the unfamiliar prevents her from venturing into an unknown darkness. She performs the positive action of going to the pier at which her

escape vessel is located, but in the end she reaches "the automatic decision of inaction" (Kenner 54) that Dublin not only allows but also forces her to make. She is, indeed, "passive, like a helpless animal" (Dubliners 23). She becomes like the proverbial deer caught in headlights: "Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (23). Eveline lacks the ability to turn her back on Dublin and is indeed paralyzed by fear: "Lacking the virtue of fortitude that strengthens the soul for compliance with the dictates of reason, she must turn back from danger and from life. Her plight exemplifies the state of the soul enclosed in the barren homeland because it is too weak to cross the threshold...." (Gheselin 73). Eveline, like the boy in "Araby," prevents herself from forming a relationship with another, and, because of fear of the unknown, she must remain in her stilted existence within the confines of Dublin. Her inability to connect with Frank confines her to the known life of Dublin.

In "Counterparts," Farrington is a prime example of the consequences of the inability to connect and form relationships with other people. It seems as though Farrington is nothing more than a machine built for productivity in his office. Farrington is disgusted with society and what it expects of him. "As suggested by the title of the story, human beings act as lifeless switches on some grand circuit board of progress" (Stuart 2). The characters of this story are like automatons who are controlled by the will of the city and must deliver what it expects of them. Machine-like imagery pervades this work, instilling a sense of detachment from the individual and a focus on the productivity of the worker. Farrington himself is, in his position at the firm, nothing more than a human photocopier. He, as an expression of his disdain for the system, turns to alcohol as an escape. However, instead of finding his salvation in the bottle, he becomes even more trapped in his automated existence as a copy boy. To get alcohol, he must work. To work, he must get alcohol. He is driven not by vanity but by what he sees as necessity to pawning his own watch when his funds for alcohol are depleted. Instead of providing himself with an escape from his job and Dublin, he has created for himself yet another trap that confines him to the city. The community that Farrington belongs to in "Counterparts" is not really a community at all; instead it is a "pseudo-community of drinking, sterile emulation, action and reaction" (Kenner 57). Farrington is unable to cope with his lonely existence as a robotic-like

worker and through alcohol takes his frustrations out on his family. A pecking order becomes evident here: Farrington, perceived as being weak, is bullied by his boss and in turn Farrington, perceiving his young child as weak, bullies the child. Farrington's wife is described as "a little sharp-faced woman who bullied her husband when he was sober and was bullied by him when he was drunk" (*Dubliners* 62). Arriving home from his night of drinking, he finds that his wife is gone, and Farrington instead bullies his small child, Tom. Farrington abuses his child in retaliation for being abused at work. Farrington, in his inability to connect with others, becomes trapped in a vicious, automated cycle of viciousness that requires no conscious effort or decision. His passivity and surrender to alcohol keeps him as nothing more than a Dubliner trapped perpetually in his city and in his miserable existence.

"A Painful Case" shows the result of a man who is able to make a connection with a woman but refuses it in a desire to have an orderly life without chaos, which necessitates him to exclude other people from his life. James Duffy isolates himself geographically by living as far as he possibly can from other Dubliners in Chapelizod, a western suburb of Dublin. He has found in his life that people lead to disorder, which he is unable to tolerate. "Mr. Duffy is presented for three pages as a person of absolute meticulous voluntary routine" (Kenner 58). Duffy is a slave to routine by choice, as opposed to Farrington's passive acceptance of his automated life. Mr. Duffy is presented with the opportunity to make a connection with another person, Emily Sinico, the neglected wife of a sea captain. The friendship that he develops with Emily draws him to Dublin from his suburban existence. When the two have a conversation, Duffy sometimes seems to be listening to himself and not communicating with her at all: "Sometimes he caught himself listening to the sound of his own voice" (*Dubliners* 73). Within the same conversation, he begins to comment on the loneliness of the soul. He comments that "We cannot give ourselves: we are our own" (73). After he makes this comment, Emily makes a gesture of affection which, in effect, repulses Duffy and he breaks off the intellectual friendship that he has forged with her. She has done that which is unforgivable by physically expressing a gesture of affection: she has challenged his ability to be self sufficient and that scares him back into isolation and the orderly existence that he was accustomed to before he

met Mrs. Sinico. Several years later, Duffy reads of his former friend's suicide under the crushing force of a train and is driven to Phoenix Park, the sight of their last encounter. It is here, in a park named for a symbol of resurrection and renewal, that Duffy has this ironic epiphany: he is "outcast from life's feast" (77). In the end, he finds himself as he did in the beginning: "He felt that he was alone" (77). By denying himself the communion with others, he denied himself life and kept himself an automaton with a predictable life, trapped still within the sight of Dublin, physically and mentally trapped by his inability to give of himself to others to form meaningful connections. His unwillingness to venture into the unknown of personal relationships because of fear, like the boy in "Araby" and Eveline, and his self-imposed isolation ensnare him within Dublin's reach.

"The Dead," the final story in this collection, presents a man again isolated, though he is married and many people seem to care for him. His inability to connect with his wife has led to an unhappy existence from which he sees no escape. Throughout most of the story, friends and relatives at a holiday gathering surround him. Much merriment and festivities occur, but Conroy feels alone throughout the festivities. After retiring to their bedroom, Gabriel, ironically sharing his name with God's messenger, hears a message from his wife, Gretta, a woman with whom he thought he shared his life, a confession that startles, disturbs and frightens him. "The final scene of 'The Dead' involves two partners in a relationship, who have a rather one-sided conversation, involving a confession; one partner then lies awake thinking after the other falls asleep" (Wright 288). Gretta confesses to Gabriel about a young man, Michael Furey, who was once very much in love with her. Gabriel immediately jumps to the conclusion that his wife may have been unfaithful, if not physically then emotionally, and jealousy envelops him, indicating that he may be connected to his wife in a substantial way or that perhaps his pride is injured. However, upon hearing the complete story of his wife and the young man, who apparently lost his life for Gretta, Gabriel's emotion of jealousy retreats into isolation but also into a different sort of jealousy: jealous that he has never felt true love. Gabriel begins to cry as he realizes that "he had never felt like that himself toward any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love" (Dubliners 152). Another man loved the one

person whom he thought that he knew so well, more than he is capable of loving her. He realizes that he has never really been connected to his wife and he watches over her as though "they had never lived together as husband and wife" (151). Through the window, he watches the forms in the distance as the same snow falls over them as over all of Dublin. He thinks of the finality of it all, that everyone will end up in the same situation. Resigning himself to this fact, he gives up the hope that he will be able to ever make a connection to his wife or anyone like Michael Furey had. The connection may not even be a desirable one for him, as he has been shown by his wife's confession that these emotions will only lead to death anyway. There is no escape from the ultimate fate or from Dublin, and Gabriel resigns himself to a living death, keeping his soul to himself instead of venturing to share it.

Dublin is "a shell of grandeur populated by wraiths" (Kenner 48). Throughout the stories, this concept becomes evident. The actual city of Dublin is the underlying thread found within all these stories. The setting controls the characters by its mere existence and pervasiveness. The characters in this book are all isolated and are alone in a city populated with hundreds of thousands of other souls. These characters, by some defect, cannot form viable relationships with other human beings. All of their relationships are shallow fragments of what can be a glorious experience: the giving of oneself to another. All of the characters are perhaps nothing more than robots, physically human but emotionally paralyzed, unable to connect their circuits to another's, leaving them utterly alone. The city is like an expanded factory that produces bodies for the purpose of producing useful output, of which happiness and emotional bonding are not included. In "Araby," the young boy realizes that his quest for a connection with the older girl is futile and that relationships are games, leaving him disillusioned with love and reducing him to nothing more than a creature driven by selfish impulses. His geographical constraints constrict his freedom and this experience drives him further into the bowels of Dublin life. In "Eveline," the title figure is confined in Dublin by her inability to face her fear of the unknown and her eventual acceptance of the familiarity of a life of misery. To her, it is better to live in a familiar, but painful, stasis rather than take the chance to improve her life by leaving Dublin. Her ultimate action is inaction, as by doing nothing,

she is able to remain in her familiar world. In "Counterparts," Farrington lives an automated existence out of what he sees as necessity: to get drunk, he must work to get money; to get money, he must work. He cannot connect to his family or his co-workers, as they are all machines to him, just as he is to himself. He is not concerned with much except the cyclical, mundane existence that he has created for himself. As a result, he cannot escape that which he does not really want to escape. In "A Painful Case," Duffy is alone and automated by choice. He lives in a routine that isolates him, voluntarily, because he believes that connections create chaos. In his discussions with his intellectual friend, Emily, she offers a gesture of physical connection, which threatens him. As a result, he withdraws all attempts even at intellectual relationships and returns to his robotic life. Upon her death, he realizes that he has denied both of them life, and he is indeed only an outcast from the feast of life. The painful case is not just the tragic suicide of Emily, but Duffy's life as well. Finally, in "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy realizes that all will have the same fate and he resigns himself to what he sees as unavoidable. Although he has a seemingly happy marriage, he realizes that even with his life he has no real connections, certainly not one like Michael Furey had with Gretta. He believes that he will never be able to change and chooses the path of inaction, remaining in his loveless but familiar life. Overall, Dublin is a place from which these Dubliners cannot escape. As Joyce wrote to a publisher, "the expression Dubliner seems to bear some meaning and I doubt whether the same can be said for such words as 'Londoner' or 'Parisian'" (Kenner 48). Joyce indeed physically escaped Dublin, but through the stories presented within this work, it is indeed very likely that he never escaped what he was: a Dubliner.

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Sources And Symbols: A Study Of Brian DePalma's *Phantom Of The Paradise*

Brian DePalma's 1974 film *Phantom of the Paradise* is more than just a simple story. The film is a confluence of several different sources, among them *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and the story of the demonic pact, such as in the Faust myth. Also, there are significant religious, mythological and folklore influences present, especially in the names of the characters, which were apparently picked for their symbolic significance. Overall, the plot of the film may not be original, but it is original in its visual effects, in its culmination of many different stories, and in the characters' and settings' symbolic attributes.

One of the most obvious influences on *Phantom of the Paradise* is *The Phantom of the Opera*. Most likely, it was the 1943 film version starring Claude Rains that influenced DePalma, not the Gaston Leroux novel (1910). In the film version, unlike the novel, the Phantom, Enrique Claudin, becomes infatuated with a young singer, much like Winslow Leach does in *The Phantom of the Paradise*. Claudin also becomes enraged at the apparent theft of his music by a publishing company, much like Winslow, and both go on murderous rampages. Claudin kills anyone who may get in the way of Christine, the beautiful young singer, becoming a star. Winslow also does the same for Phoenix, but he also kills because his music has been usurped from him and is sung by those he feels unworthy. Both Claudin and Winslow are disfigured, and they both hide it with masks stolen from prop rooms. Visually, there are also similarities: Claudin releases a chandelier from the ceiling to destroy the opera on the first night it re-opens after the murder of the female lead, and Winslow uses a neon lightening bolt to destroy the opening of the Paradise. In each film, it appears as if light leads to death and, in these cases, a triumph of what appears to be evil to the phantom protagonists. In both films, it is apparent that the obsessive love of the respective phantoms drives them to

murder in order to promote the careers of their fixations.

Another film from which *Phantom of the Paradise* draws is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1943). In this film version of Oscar Wilde's novelette (1891) of the same name, Dorian Gray forms a pact with an unknown deity so that his good friend Basil Hawthorne's painting of him shall grow old rather than him. He freely offers his soul for eternal youth, much as Swan does. Dorian is enamored with music, especially the singing of a particular girl, Sibyl Vane. He causes her death, along with the death of many others in his life, while he is racked by depravity without him showing a single sign of aging. Dorian turns the story of Faust inward, much as Swan does, by summoning the evil from within him, rather than calling upon evil from outside of himself (Shattuck 82). Dorian, however, like Faust, does experience immense guilt over his actions and tries to reform: "They come to know too much about their hidden being and can no longer believe in their own integrity" (99). The idea of the haunted portrait is translated in the movie into the haunted videotape that serves as a reminder to Swan of his deal with the devil. The picture becomes a projection of the soul in Dorian's case (Ziolkowski 80), and the tape becomes the soul in Swan's case. Upon the destruction of the portrait, Dorian dies and instantaneously ages; he destroys his soul and himself long before (128). When Swan's image is destroyed, he too instantaneously ages, but does not immediately die, but rather becomes vulnerable. As Winslow stabs him, he immediately begins to bleed, as he does not do upon Winslow's previous attempt. Winslow also kills himself. His self-inflicted injury opens as Swan dies. Winslow's supernatural protection against harm ends with Swan's death.

Mythology and religion have contributed much to culture, especially literature and cinema. Mythical stories shape human culture profoundly (Martin and Ostwalt 66), and "In film, we witness the simultaneous critique of some of the previous modes of religious image and greater fulfillment of others" (66). In *Phantom of the Paradise*, both religious and mythological references are found, which contributes to the film's depth. The presence of these mythological references demand the viewer to ponder the meaning behind them: "Like myths, mythological films take people to places beyond the boundaries of the known world and require viewers to negotiate an encounter with 'a world elsewhere,' with a world

that is 'wholly other' and is, therefore, sacred or religiously significant" (69). In this film, like mythology, a hero is present and crucial to the film. The hero in this film falls into Northrop Frye's fifth mode of the hero, the ironic, in which the character is seen as inferior to the viewer, and the viewer looks down on the absurd plight of the hero (May and Bird 68). Winslow, the hero, is both triumphant and defeated as he destroys that which has destroyed him. This idea is important in mythology as well as contemporary film, as the triumph of the hero brings hope to the reader/viewer and the defeat of the hero "indicts the social forces that thwart human fulfillment" and helps the reader/viewer to name obstacles (Martin and Ostwalt 70). "The story of the hero provides people with a way to mythologize their life [sic] and to make their own struggles coherent and purposeful" (70).

Swan, the name of the villain in this film, is significant traditionally and mythologically. Zeus, in the form of a swan, seduced Leda, the wife of King Tyndarus of Sparta, and produced Pollux and Helen of Troy (Hamilton 41). The power of the swan over a mortal is perhaps best shown in W.B. Yeats poem "Leda and the Swan." The poem shows the destructive and forceful power of the swan, whose actions ultimately caused the Trojan War. In *Phantom of the Paradise*, much ruin also comes about because of the seduction of Swan: many people die, his new rock palace is all but destroyed by the maddened crowd, and he himself succumbs to the one he exploited the most. Another interpretation of the swan, also quite negative, comes from the folklore of the medieval bestiary which indicates that, although the plumage of the bird is white, the bird has "utterly black flesh": "Thus it is a symbol of the hypocrite, whose black sinful flesh is clothed by white garments. When the bird's white plumage is stripped away, its black flesh is roasted in the fire. So, too, will the hypocrite, once dead, be stripped of worldly splendor and descend into the fires of hell" (Biedermann 334). Both Swan and Dorian Gray are primary examples of this. Though Swan may seem harmless, because of his stature, he is malevolent and dishonest in his dealings. He lies to Winslow on several occasions and tricks him into giving him the cantata under the pretense that it is for Phoenix, when he knows that it will be for another. Yet Swan does get his just dessert as he is destroyed by Winslow and will descend into Hell, to give his dedicated soul to the devil.

Another character whose name contains much significance is Phoenix. From the folklore of many different cultures, the phoenix is a fabulous bird that, every five-hundred years, consumes itself in its own fire and rises up in youth from its own ashes; before burning itself, however, it “sings a melodious song, flaps its wings to fan the fire, is consumed to ashes and rises again rejuvenated” (Bonnerjea 197). The phoenix is also associated with Jesus Christ in Christian mythology. “The fathers of the Church logically viewed the bird as a typological symbol of the immortal soul and the resurrection of Christ” (Bierdermann 264). Yet another view of the phoenix comes from the alchemists to whom it symbolized “the destruction and new formation of *materia prima* on its way to becoming the philosopher’s stone” (264). In *Phantom of the Paradise*, Phoenix embodies all three of these different interpretations. Initially, Phoenix does what the mythological phoenix does: she destroys herself and rises from her remains. She begins as a struggling singer who will “give anything” at first just to sing and then to be famous. She resists giving into the easy way to become a famous singer—she refuses to sleep her way to the top. Later, she is given a formal audition at the insistence of Winslow, and she gets the job. Tellingly, she succeeds only after dancing around and flapping her arms much like a bird fanning the fire that is to become her destruction. When she is forced to sing before a maddened crowd after the death of Beef, she is singing her “swan song.” After the crowd is enamored with her and she is considered a success, Swan lures her into a lifetime contract in which she gives up what she treasures the most—her voice—in order to become famous. After she falls and is bound by contract, she is the willing property of Swan, as seen in the bedroom scene which Winslow witnesses and is mortified by, is destroyed, and is no more than his property to be exploited just as Winslow was. She is fortunate enough to not be under contract very long, as she is, in essence, restored when Winslow kills Swan. Phoenix functions as Christ in a more abstract way. Phoenix is the force that keeps Winslow alive. She becomes Winslow’s voice, the reason he continues to write and live. Without her, Winslow would probably not have lived through his traumatic injuries to write his cantata, as he had already exacted revenge on Swan by destroying the records of his earlier music sung by the Juicy Fruits. She is, in effect, his savior and his light. He sees her as goodness, no matter what she does, and he even dies for her so

that she may regain what he has lost. Abstractly, she is his savior, but he is also hers. Finally, Phoenix is like the *materia prima* that the alchemists thought the bird represented. Phoenix is, at first, represented to the viewer as the innocent—all she wanted to do was sing. She was then transformed with Swan's help because of the desire for fame into a creature of greed. At the end in her realization that the Phantom was actually Winslow, she becomes enlightened in the chaotic final scene as to what she has done and will presumably walk away from the events as a wiser and more experienced creature. Phoenix serves many functions in this film, much as the mythological phoenix has come to represent.

The obvious hero of the film is Winslow Leach, and, as the hero, he represents a Christ-like figure as he dies for the mistake of Phoenix and destroys the evil. He also is the sympathetic hero. Viewers can easily pity his misfortune, yet find his warped sense of virtue intriguing. In effect, Winslow is Phoenix's savior. Though Winslow does not represent Christ in a traditional way, he does in an unorthodox manner. Winslow is persecuted by Swan and his henchman early in the film and is denied by Phoenix, as Peter denied Christ. Phoenix refuses to believe that Winslow is alive and that he is there to warn her about the evil of Swan. She recoils in horror after seeing his disfigured face. The denial plus the saving of Phoenix lead to the interpretation of Winslow as a Christ-like figure. The viewer of this film must, almost by necessity, have feelings of pity for Winslow. Winslow is swindled into giving up his music to an evil man because of his naivete. The viewer can easily predict that this innocent soul will be tricked. The situation for Winslow continually grows worse as he is framed and thrown into jail due to the machinations of Swan. After breaking free and exacting minor revenge, Winslow's fortune becomes even worse as he becomes disfigured by the machine which is stamping out his stolen music. He is disfigured by his own creativity. Winslow's motives are not evil after this point: as a condition of the pact with Swan, only Phoenix is to sing his music. However, Swan must have had a loophole in the contract, and poor Winslow's music was taken again to be sung by the flamboyant Beef, who meets his end at the hands of a very angry Winslow. The destruction of the effeminate Beef, however, serves as a catalyst for Phoenix's fall, and Winslow again has been foiled in his attempt to do good. Winslow is a hero for Phoenix and a pitiful creature to the viewer,

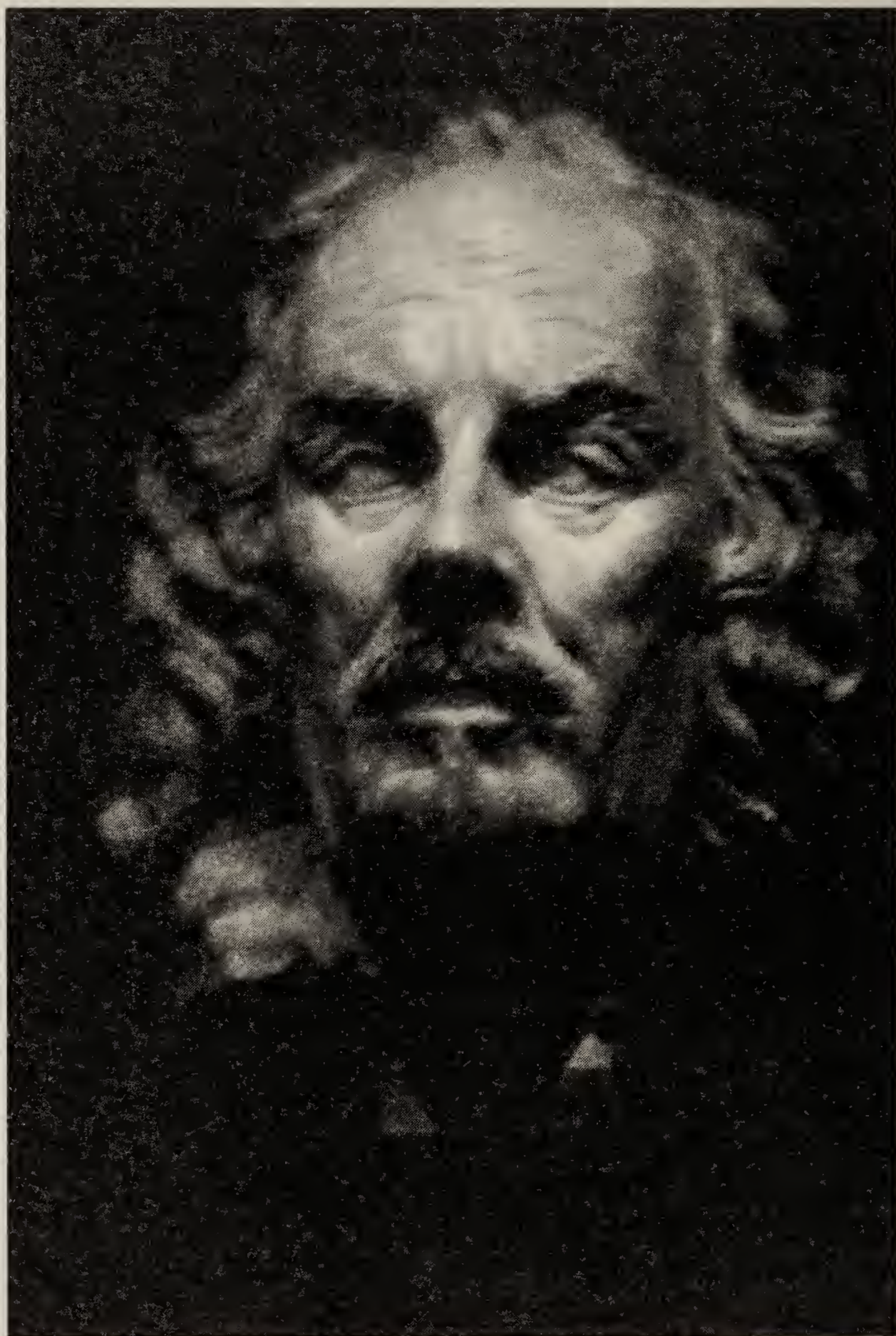
but he functions as a savior overall.

Another important aspect of the film containing religious and mythological significance is the name of Swan's rock palace, the Paradise. Paradise has many different images attached to it. Paradise was often thought of as "the image of a garden of delights, free of all danger, the domain of sinless men and women of earliest times" (Biedermann 254). Clearly, the Paradise of this film is an inversion of this concept since much danger is present in the Paradise for those who are on the wrong side of both Winslow and Swan, and the Paradise is the domain of a man who has sold his soul to the Devil and is clearly not sinless. The hedonism in the Islamic description of paradise may in fact be more appropriate, as it includes sexual pleasures for the men admitted to it (254), just as Swan reaps from Phoenix and the women who are attempting to ingratiate themselves to him. Swan and his crew clearly are not dwelling with God in the Paradise; instead they are in the absence of God.

Phantom of the Paradise is a culmination of many different stories and parts of Western mythology. It is clearly a derivative tale. DePalma has drawn from the films *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Phantom of the Opera* (1943), and various mythological and religious sources to construct a story about obsessive love, evil, hedonism, and the destruction of evil through love. DePalma calls upon the viewer to think, not only of the symbols of the past by using mythologically and culturally significant names for his characters, but also of images of the past by using obvious sources from film. Overall, *Phantom of the Paradise* is not just a simple story. It is a complex tale with many subtleties that lead to a story with more meaning than appears on the surface.

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SALLIE E. JOHNSON has returned to college to earn the degree that was put on hold while she raised four decades of offspring. Her goal is to have her degree before her youngest child receives his.

MATTHEW R. KOMINIAREK, majoring in Liberal Studies, is concentrating in natural science and English. He writes poetry and takes photos when he loses time.

BRENDA LIKAVEC, after graduating in May 1999 with a bachelor's degree in English, plans to go to graduate school. In her sparse spare time, she likes to go on road trips, talk about Oscar Wilde, and eat Jeno's Pizza Rolls. She would like to thank the following people (in no particular order) for their friendship/support/torment throughout her undergraduate career: Dr. Roger Schlobin, Dr. Mick Loggins, Bob Cox, Rob Myers, John Tharp, John Davey, Aaron W., Shaun, Ed, Nick, Gene, Bill B., Adam, Erika, Uncle Nasty, The Cool Kids, and Grover, her favorite cat.

CHRIS MILLER is a freshman who is majoring in journalism for the moment. He would either like to be a writer for a music-oriented magazine or become a recording engineer. Chris was told not to attend college by numerous teachers and even his high school guidance counselor, though now he has (for revenge's sake), somehow managed to pull a 4.0 gpa through freshman year.

DAVID RILEY is a freshman at Purdue University North Central's program at the Westville Correctional Facility. He plans to pursue a degree in social work and become an advocate of using education as a means of rehabilitating offenders, because few people realize that "the vilest deeds like poison weeds bloom well in prison air; it is only what is good in man that wastes and withers there" (Oscar Wilde).

DORI SCHNICK wrote the poem "My Momma" as a sophomore majoring in elementary education, but as of January 1999, she is an English education major. She is a junior at West Lafayette as of August 1999, and will earn her bachelor's degree there. She changed majors so that she can share her love of words and writing with teenagers. Although she has been writing for sixteen years, this was the first contest she entered. She is thrilled to be in this publication.

CHRIS WOLFENBARGER is a freshman and plans to graduate with associate degrees in computer technology and business administration.

